

The Adventures Harry Richmond — Volume 7 eBook

The Adventures Harry Richmond — Volume 7 by George Meredith

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WITHIN AN INCH OF MY LIFE

A single tent stood in a gully running from one of the gravel-pits of the heath, near an iron-red rillet, and a girl of Kiomi's tribe leaned over the lazy water at half length, striking it with her handkerchief. At a distance of about twice a stone's-throw from the new carriage-road between Durstan and Bulsted, I fancied from old recollections she might be Kiomi herself. This was not the time for her people to be camping on Durstan. Besides, I feared it improbable that one would find her in any of the tracks of her people. The noise of the wheels brought the girl's face round to me. She was one of those who were babies in the tents when I was a boy. We were too far apart for me to read her features. I lay back in the carriage, thinking that it would have been better for my poor little wild friend if I had never crossed the shadow of her tents. A life caught out of its natural circle is as much in danger of being lost as a limb given to a wheel in spinning machinery; so it occurred to me, until I reflected that Prince Ernest might make the same remark, and deplore the damage done to the superior machinery likewise.

My movements appeared to interest the girl. She was up on a mound of the fast-purpling heath, shading her eyes to watch me, when I called at Bulsted lodge-gates to ask for a bed under Julia's roof that night. Her bare legs twinkled in a nimble pace on the way to Durstan Hall, as if she was determined to keep me in sight. I waved my hand to her. She stopped. A gipsy's girl's figure is often as good an index to her mind as her face, and I perceived that she had not taken my greeting favourably; nor would she advance a step to my repeated beckonings; I tried hat, handkerchief, purse, in vain. My driver observed that she was taken with a fit of the obstinacy of 'her lot.' He shouted, 'Silver,' and then 'Fortune.' She stood looking. The fellow discoursed on the nature of gipsies. Foxes were kept for hunting, he said; there was reason in that. Why we kept gipsies none could tell. He once backed a gipsy prizefighter, who failed to keep his appointment. 'Heart sunk too low below his belt, sir. You can't reckon on them for performances. And that same man afterwards fought the gamest fight in the chronicles o' the Ring! I knew he had it in him. But they're like nothing better than the weather; you can't put money on 'em and feel safe.' Consequently he saw no good in them.

'She sticks to her post,' he said, as we turned into the Durstan grounds. The girl was like a flag-staff on the upper line of heathland.

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Heriot was strolling, cigar in mouth, down one of the diminutive alleys of young fir in this upstart estate. He affected to be prepossessed by the case between me and Edbury, and would say nothing of his own affairs, save that he meant to try for service in one of the Continental armies; he whose susceptible love for his country was almost a malady. But he had given himself to women it was Cissy this, Trichy that, and the wiles of a Florence, the spites of an Agatha, duperies, innocent-seemings, witcheries, reptile-tricks of the fairest of women, all through his conversation. He had so saturated himself with the resources, evasions, and desperate cruising of these light creatures of wind, tide, and tempest, that, like one who has been gazing on the whirligoround, he saw the whole of women running or only waiting for a suitable partner to run the giddy ring to perdition and an atoning pathos.

I cut short one of Heriot's narratives by telling him that this picking bones of the dish was not to my taste. He twitted me with turning parson. I spoke of Kiomi. Heriot flushed, muttering, 'The little devil!' with his usual contemplative relish of devilry. We parted, feeling that severe tension of the old links keeping us together which indicates the lack of new ones: a point where simple affection must bear the strain of friendship if it can. Heriot had promised to walk half-way with me to Bulsted, in spite of Lady Maria's childish fears of some attack on him. He was now satisfied with a good-bye at the hall-doors, and he talked ostentatiously of a method that he had to bring Edbury up to the mark. I knew that same loud decreeing talk to be a method on his own behalf of concealing his sensitive resentment at the tone I had adopted: Lady Maria's carriage had gone to fetch her husband from a political dinner. My portmanteau advised me to wait for its return. Durstan and Riversley were at feud, however, owing to some powerful rude English used toward the proprietor of the former place by the squire; so I thought it better to let one of the grooms shoulder my luggage, and follow him.

The night was dark; he chose the roadway, and I crossed the heath, meeting an exhilarating high wind that made my blood race: Egoism is not peculiar to any period of life; it is only especially curious in a young man beginning to match himself against his elders, for in him it suffuses the imagination; he is not merely selfishly sentient, or selfishly scheming: his very conceptions are selfish. I remember walking at my swiftest pace, blaming everybody I knew for insufficiency, for want of subordination to my interests, for poverty of nature, grossness, blindness to the fine lights shining in me; I blamed the Fates for harassing me, circumstances for not surrounding me with friends worthy of me. The central 'I' resembled the sun of this universe, with the difference that it shrieked for nourishment, instead of dispensing it.

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My monstrous conceit of elevation will not suffer condensation into sentences. What I can testify to is, that for making you bless the legs you stand on, a knockdown blow is a specific. I had it before I knew that a hand was up. I should have fancied that I had run athwart a tree, but for the recollection, as I was reeling to the ground, of a hulk of a fellow suddenly fronting me, and he did not hesitate with his fist. I went over and over into a heathery hollow. The wind sang shrill through the furzes; nothing was visible but black clumps, black cloud. Astonished though I was, and shaken, it flashed through me that this was not the attack of a highwayman. He calls upon you to stand and deliver: it is a foe that hits without warning. The blow took me on the forehead, and might have been worse. Not seeing the enemy, curiosity was almost as strong in me as anger; but reflecting that I had injured no one I knew of, my nerves were quickly at the right pitch. Brushing some spikes of furze off my hands, I prepared for it. A cry rose. My impression seemed to be all backward, travelling up to me a moment or two behind time. I recognised a strange tongue in the cry, but too late that it was Romany to answer it. Instantly a voice was audible above the noisy wind: 'I spot him.' Then began some good and fair fighting. I got my footing on grass, and liked the work. The fellow facing me was unmistakably gipsy-build. I, too, had length of arm, and a disposition to use it by hitting straight out, with footing firm, instead of dodging and capering, which told in my favour, and is decidedly the best display of the noble art on a dark night.

My dancer went over as neatly as I had preceded him; and therewith I considered enough was done for vengeance. The thrill of a salmon on the gut is known to give a savage satisfaction to our original nature; it is but an extension and attenuation of the hearty contentment springing from a thorough delivery of the fist upon the prominent features of an assailant that yields to it perforce. Even when you receive such perfect blows you are half satisfied. Feeling conqueror, my wrath was soothed; I bent to have a look at my ruffian, and ask him what cause of complaint gipsies camping on Durstan could find against Riversley. A sharp stroke on the side of my neck sent me across his body. He bit viciously. In pain and desperation I flew at another of the tawny devils. They multiplied. I took to my heels; but this was the vainest of stratagems, they beat me in nimbleness. Four of them were round me when I wheeled breathless to take my chance at fighting the odds. Fiery men have not much notion of chivalry: gipsies the least of all. They yelled disdain of my summons to them to come on one by one: 'Now they had caught me, now they would pay me, now they would pound me; and, standing at four corners, they commended me to think of becoming a jelly. Four though they were, they kept their positions; they left it to me to rush in for a close; the hinder ones held out of arms' reach so long as I was disengaged. I had perpetually to shift my front, thinking—Oh, for a stick! any stout bit of timber! My fists ached, and a repetition of nasty dull knocks on back and neck, slogging thumps dealt by men getting to make sure of me, shattered my breathing.

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I cried out for a pause, offered to take a couple of them at a time: I challenged three-the fourth to bide. I was now the dancer: left, right, and roundabout I had to swing, half-stunned, half-strangled with gorge. Those terrible blows in the back did the mischief. Sickness threatened to undermine me. Boxers have breathing-time: I had none. Stiff and sick, I tried to run; I tottered, I stood to be knocked down, I dropped like a log-careless of life. But I smelt earth keenly, and the damp grass and the devil's play of their feet on my chin, chest, and thighs, revived a fit of wrath enough to set me staggering on my legs again. They permitted it, for the purpose of battering me further. I passed from down to up mechanically, and enjoyed the chestful of air given me in the interval of rising: thought of Germany and my father, and Janet at her window, complacently; raised a child's voice in my throat for mercy, quite inaudible, and accepted my punishment. One idea I had was, that I could not possibly fail as a speaker after this—I wanted but a minute's grace to fetch breath for an oration, beginning, 'You fools!' for I guessed that they had fallen upon the wrong man. Not a second was allowed. Soon the shrewd physical bracing, acting momentarily on my brain, relaxed; the fitful illumination ceased: all ideas faded out-clung about my beaten body-fled. The body might have been tossed into its grave, for aught I knew.

CHAPTER XLVI

AMONG GIPSY WOMEN

I cannot say how long it was after my senses had gone when I began to grope for them on the warmest of heaving soft pillows, and lost the slight hold I had on them with the effort. Then came a series of climbings and fallings, risings to the surface and sinkings fathoms below. Any attempt to speculate pitched me back into darkness. Gifted with a pair of enormous eyes, which threw surrounding objects to a distance of a mile away, I could not induce the diminutive things to approach; and shutting eyes led to such a rolling of mountains in my brain, that, terrified by the gigantic revolution, I lay determinedly staring; clothed, it seemed positive, in a tight-fitting suit of sheet-lead; but why? I wondered why, and immediately received an extinguishing blow. My pillow was heavenly; I was constantly being cooled on it, and grew used to hear a croon no more musical than the unstopped reed above my head; a sound as of a breeze about a cavern's mouth, more soothing than a melody. Conjecture of my state, after hovering timidly in dread of relapses, settled and assured me I was lying baked, half-buried in an old river-bed; moss at my cheek, my body inextricable; water now and then feebly striving to float me out, with horrid pain, with infinite refreshingness. A shady light, like the light through leafage, I could see; the water I felt. Why did it keep trying to move me? I questioned and sank to the depths again.

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The excruciated patient was having his wet bandages folded across his bruises, and could not bear a motion of the mind.

The mind's total apathy was the sign of recovering health. Kind nature put that district to sleep while she operated on the disquieted lower functions. I looked on my later self as one observes the mossy bearded substances travelling blind along the undercurrent of the stream, clinging to this and that, twirling absurdly.

Where was I? Not in a house. But for my condition of absolute calm, owing to skilful treatment, open air, and physical robustness, the scene would have been of a kind to scatter the busy little workmen setting up the fabric of my wits. A lighted oil-cup stood on a tripod in the middle of a tent-roof, and over it the creased neck and chin of a tall old woman, splendid in age, reddened vividly; her black eyes and grey brows, and greyishblack hair fell away in a dusk of their own. I thought her marvellous. Something she held in her hands that sent a thin steam between her and the light. Outside, in the A cutting of the tent's threshold, a heavy-coloured sunset hung upon dark land. My pillow meantime lifted me gently at a regular measure, and it was with untroubled wonder that I came to the knowledge of a human heart beating within it. So soft could only be feminine; so firm still young. The bosom was Kiomi's. A girl sidled at the opening of the tent, peeping in, and from a mufed rattle of subpectoral thunder discharged at her in quick heated snaps, I knew Kiomi's voice. After an altercation of their monotonous gipsy undertones, the girl dropped and crouched outside.

It was morning when I woke next, stronger, and aching worse. I was lying in the air, and she who served for nurse, pillow, parasol, and bank of herbage, had her arms round beneath mine cherishingly, all the fingers outspread and flat on me, just as they had been when I went to sleep.

'Kiomi!'

'Now, you be quiet.'

'Can I stand up a minute or two?'

'No, and you won't talk.'

I submitted. This was our duel all day: she slipped from me only twice, and when she did the girl took her place.

I began to think of Bulsted and Riversley.

'Kiomi, how long have I been here?'

'You 'll be twice as long as you've been.'



‘A couple of days?’

‘More like a dozen.’

‘Just tell me what happened.’

‘Ghm-m-m,’ she growled admonishingly.

Reflecting on it, I felt sure there must have been searching parties over the heath.

‘Kiomi, I say, how was it they missed me?’

She struck at once on my thought.

‘They’re fools.’

‘How did you cheat them?’

‘I didn’t tie a handkercher across their eyes.’

‘You half smothered me once, in the combe.’

‘You go to sleep.’

‘Have you been doctor?’

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The growling tigerish 'Ghm-m-m' constrained me to take it for a lullaby.

'Kiomi, why the deuce did your people attack me?' She repeated the sound resembling that which sometimes issues from the vent of a mine; but I insisted upon her answering.

'I 'll put you down and be off,' she threatened.

'Brute of a girl! I hate you!'

'Hate away.'

'Tell me who found me.'

'I shan't. You shut your peepers.'

The other and younger girl sung out: 'I found you.'

Kiomi sent a volley at her.

'I did,' said the girl; 'yes, and I nursed you first, I did; and mother doctored you. Kiomi hasn't been here a day.'

The old mother came out of the tent. She felt my pulse, and forthwith squatted in front of me. 'You're hard to kill, and oily as a bean,' said she. 'You've only to lie quiet in the sun like a handsome gentleman; I'm sure you couldn't wish for more. Air and water's the doctor for such as you. You've got the bound in you to jump the ditch: don't you fret at it, or you'll lose your spring, my good gentleman.'

'Leave off talking to me as a stranger,' I bawled. 'Out with it; why have you kept me here? Why did your men pitch into me?'

'*Our* men, my good gentleman!' the old woman ejaculated. There was innocence indeed! sufficient to pass the whole tribe before a bench of magistrates. She wheedled: 'What have they against a handsome gentleman like you? They'd run for you fifty mile a day, and show you all their tricks and secrets for nothing.'

My despot Kiomi fired invectives at her mother. The old mother retorted; the girl joined in. All three were scowling, flashing, showing teeth, driving the wordy javelin upon one another, indiscriminately, or two to one, without a pause; all to a sound like the slack silver string of the fiddle.

I sang out truce to them; they racked me with laughter; and such laughter!—the shaking of husks in a half-empty sack.

Ultimately, on a sudden cessation of the storm of tongues, they agreed that I must have my broth.

Sheer weariness, seasoned with some hope that the broth would give me strength to mount on my legs and walk, persuaded me to drink it. Still the old mother declared that none of her men would ever have laid hands on me. Why should they? she asked. What had I done to them? Was it their way?

Kiomi's arms tightened over my breast. The involuntary pressure was like an illumination to me.

No longer asking for the grounds of the attack on a mistaken person, and bowing to the fiction that none of the tribe had been among my assailants, I obtained information. The girl Eveleen had spied me entering Durstan. Quite by chance, she was concealed near Bulsted Park gates when the groom arrived and told the lodge-keeper that Mr. Harry Richmond was coming up over the heath, and might have lost his way. 'Richmond!' the girl threw a world of meaning into the unexpected name. Kiomi clutched me to her bosom, but no one breathed the name we had in our thoughts.

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Eveleen and the old mother had searched for me upon the heath, and having haled me head and foot to their tent, despatched a message to bring Kiomi down from London to aid them in their desperate shift. They knew Squire Beltham's temper. He would have scattered the tribe to the shores of the kingdom at a rumour of foul play to his grandson. Kiomi came in time to smuggle me through an inspection of the tent and cross-examination of its ostensible denizens by Captain Bulsted, who had no suspicions, though he was in a state of wonderment. Hearing all this, I was the first to say it would be better I should get out of the neighbourhood as soon as my legs should support me. The grin that goes for a laugh among gipsies followed my question of how Kiomi had managed to smuggle me. Eveleen was my informant when the dreaded Kiomi happened to be off duty for a minute. By a hasty transformation, due to a nightcap on the bandages about the head, and an old petticoat over my feet, Captain William's insensible friend was introduced to him as the sore sick great-grandmother of the tribe, mother of Kiomi's mother, aged ninety-one. The captain paid like a man for doctor and burial fees; he undertook also to send the old lady a pound of snuff to assist her to a last sneeze or two on the right side of the grave, and he kept his word; for, deeming it necessary to paint her in a characteristic, these prodigious serpents told him gravely that she delighted in snuff; it was almost the only thing that kept her alive, barring a sip of broth. Captain William's comment on the interesting piece of longevity whose well-covered length and framework lay exposed to his respectful contemplation, was, that she must have been a devilish fine old lady in her day. 'Six foot' was given as her measurement.

One pound of snuff, a bottle of rum, and five sovereigns were the fruits of the captain's sensibility. I shattered my ribs with laughter over the story. Eveleen dwelt on the triumph, twinkling. Kiomi despised laughter or triumph resulting from the natural exercise of craft in an emergency. 'But my handsome gentleman he won't tell on us, will he, when we've nursed him and doctored him, and made him one of us, and as good a stick o' timber as grows in the forest?' whined the old mother. I had to swear I would not.

'He!' cried Kiomi.

'He may forget us when he's gone,' the mother said. She would have liked me to kiss a book to seal the oath. Anxiety about the safety of their 'homes,' that is, the assurance of an untroubled reception upon their customary camping-ground, is a peculiarity of the gipsies, distinguishing them, equally with their cleanliness and thriftiness, from mumpers and the common wanderers.

It is their tribute to civilization, which generally keeps them within the laws.

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Who that does not know them will believe that under their domestic system I had the best broth and the best tea I have ever tasted! They are very cunning brewers and sagacious buyers too; their maxims show them to direct all their acuteness upon obtaining quality for their money. A compliment not backed by silver is hardly intelligible to the pretty ones: money is a really credible thing to them; and when they have it, they know how to use it. Apparently because they know so well, so perfectly appreciating it, they have only vague ideas of a corresponding sentiment on the opposite side to the bargain, and imagine that they fool people much more often than they succeed in doing. Once duped themselves, they are the wariest of the dog-burnt; the place is notched where it occurred, and for ever avoided. On the other hand, they repose implicit faith in a reputation vouched for by their experience. I was amused by the girl Eveleen's dotting of houses over the breadth of five counties, where for this and that article of apparel she designed to expend portions of a golden guinea, confident that she would get the very best, and a shilling besides. The unwonted coin gave her the joy of supposing she cheated the Mint of that sum. This guinea was a present to the girl (to whom I owed my thrashing, by the way) that excused itself under cover of being a bribe for sight of a mirror interdicted by the implacable Kiomi. I wanted to have a look at my face. Now that the familiar scenes were beginning to wear their original features to me, my dread of personal hideousness was distressing, though Eveleen declared the bad blood in my cheeks and eyes 'had been sucked by pounds of red meat.' I wondered, whether if I stood up and walked to either one of the three great halls lying in an obtuse triangle within view, I should easily be recognized. When I did see myself, I groaned verily. With the silence of profound resignation, I handed back to Eveleen the curious fragment of her boudoir, which would have grimaced at Helen of Troy.

'You're feeling your nose—you've been looking at a glass!' Kiomi said, with supernatural swiftness of deduction on her return.

She added for my comfort that nothing was broken, but confessed me to be still 'a sight'; and thereupon drove knotty language at Eveleen. The girl retorted, and though these two would never acknowledge to me that any of their men had been in this neighbourhood recently, the fact was treated as a matter of course in their spiteful altercation, and each saddled the other with the mistake they had committed. Eveleen snatched the last word. What she said I did not comprehend, she must have hit hard. Kiomi's eyes lightened, and her lips twitched; she coloured like the roofing smoke of the tent fire; twice she showed her teeth, as in a spasm, struck to the heart, unable to speak, breathing in and out of a bitterly disjointed mouth. Eveleen ran. I guessed at the ill-word spoken. Kiomi sat eyeing the wood-ashes, a devouring gaze that shot straight and read but one thing. They who have seen wild creatures die will have her before them, saving the fiery eyes. She became an ashen-colour, I took her little hand. Unconscious of me, her brown fingers clutching at mine, she flung up her nostrils, craving air.

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This was the picture of the woman who could not weep in her misery.

'Kiomi, old friend!' I called to her. I could have cursed that other friend, the son of mischief; for she, I could have sworn, had been fiercely and wantonly hunted. Chastity of nature, intense personal pride, were as proper to her as the free winds are to the heaths: they were as visible to dull divination as the milky blue about the iris of her eyeballs. She had actually no animal vileness, animal though she might be termed, and would have appeared if compared with Heriot's admirable Cissies and Gwennies, and other ladies of the Graces that run to fall, and spend their pains more in kindling the scent of the huntsman than in effectively flying.

There was no consolation for her.

The girl Eveleen came in sight, loitering and looking, kicking her idle heels.

Kiomi turned sharp round to me.

'I'm going. Your father's here, up at Bulsted. I'll see him. He won't tell. He'll come soon. You'll be fit to walk in a day. You're sound as a nail. Goodbye—I shan't say good-bye twice,' she answered my attempt to keep her, and passed into the tent, out of which she brought a small bundle tied in a yellow handkerchief, and walked away, without nodding or speaking.

'What was that you said to Kiomi?' I questioned Eveleen, who was quickly beside me.

She replied, accurately or not: 'I told her our men'd give her as good as she gave me, let her wait and see.'

Therewith she pouted; or, to sketch her with precision, 'snouted' would better convey the vivacity of her ugly flash of features. It was an error in me to think her heartless. She talked of her aunt Kiomi affectionately, for a gipsy girl, whose modulated tones are all addressed to the soft public. Eveleen spoke with the pride of bated breath of the ferocious unforgivingness of their men. Perhaps if she had known that I traced the good repute of the tribes for purity to the sweeter instincts of the women, she would have eulogized her sex to amuse me. Gipsy girls, like other people, are fond of showing off; but it would have been a victory of education to have helped her to feel the distinction of the feminine sense of shame half as awfully and warmly as she did the inscrutable iron despotism of the males. She hinted that the mistake of which I had been the victim would be rectified.

'Tell your men I'll hunt them down like rats if I hear of it,' said I.

While we were conversing my father arrived. Eveleen, not knowing him, would have had me accept the friendly covering of a mat.

'Here 's a big one! he's a clergyman,' she muttered to herself, and ran to him and set up a gipsy whine, fronting me up to the last step while she advanced; she only yielded ground to my outcry.

My father bent over me. Kiomi had prepared him for what he saw. I quieted his alarm by talking currently and easily. Julia Bulsted had despatched a messenger to inform him of my mysterious disappearance; but he, as his way was, revelling in large conjectures, had half imagined me seized by a gust of passion, and bound for Germany. 'Without my luggage?' I laughed.

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'Ay, without your luggage, Richie,' he answered seriously. His conceit of a better knowledge of me than others possessed, had buoyed him up. 'For I knew,' he said, 'we two do nothing like the herd of men. I thought you were off to her, my boy. Now!' he looked at me, and this look of dismay was a perfect mirror. I was not a presentable object.

He stretched his limbs on the heather and kept hold of my hand, looking and talking watchfully, doctor-like, doubting me to be as sound in body as I assured him I was, despite aches and pains. Eveleen hung near.

'These people have been kind to you?' he said.

'No, the biggest brutes on the earth,' said I.

'Oh! you say that, when I spotted you out in the dark where you might have lied to be eaten, and carried you and washed your bloody face, and watched you, and never slept, I didn't, to mother you and wet your head!' cried the girl.

My father beckoned to her and thanked her appreciably in the yellow tongue.

'So these scoundrels of the high road fell upon you and robbed you, Richie?'

I nodded.

'You let him think they robbed you, and you had your purse to give me a gold guinea out of it!' Eveleen cried, and finding herself in the wrong track, volubly resumed: 'That they didn't, for they hadn't time, whether they meant to, and the night black as a coal, whoever they were.'

The mystery of my not having sent word to Bulsted or to Riversley perplexed my father.

'Comfortable here!' he echoed me, disconsolately, and glanced at the heath, the tent, the black circle of the broth-pot, and the wild girl.

CHAPTER XLVII

MY FATHER ACTS THE CHARMER AGAIN

Kiomi's mother was seen in a turn of the gravel-cutting, bearing purchases from Durstan village. She took the new circumstances in with a single cast up of her wary eyelids; and her, and her skill in surgery and art in medicine, I praised to lull her fears, which procured me the denomination of old friend, as well as handsome gentleman: she went so far as to add, in a fit of natural warmth, nice fellow; and it is the truth, that this term effected wonders in flattering me: it seemed to reveal to me how simple it was for Harry

Richmond, one whom gipsies could think a nice fellow, to be the lord of Janet's affections—to be her husband. My heart throbbed; yet she was within range of a mile and a half, and I did not wish to be taken to her. I did wish to smell the piney air about the lake-palace; but the thought of Ottilia caused me no quick pulsations.

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My father remained an hour. He could not perceive the drift of my objection to go either to Bulsted or to Riversley, and desire that my misadventure should be unknown at those places. However, he obeyed me, as I could always trust him to do scrupulously, and told a tale at Bulsted. In the afternoon he returned in a carriage to convey me to the seaside. When I was raised I fainted, and saw the last of the camp on Durstan much as I had come to it first. Sickness and swimming of the head continued for several days. I was persecuted with the sensation of the carriage journey, and an iteration of my father's that ran: 'My son's inanimate body in my arms,' or 'Clasping the lifeless body of my sole son, Harry Richmond,' and other variations. I said nothing about it. He told me aghast that I had spat blood. A battery of eight fists, having it in the end all its own way, leaves a deeper indentation on its target than a pistol-shot that passes free of the vital chords. My convalescence in Germany was a melody compared with this. I ought to have stopped in the tent, according to the wise old mother's advice, given sincerely, for prudence counselled her to strike her canvas and be gone. There I should have lain, interested in the progress of a bee, the course of a beetle or a cloud, a spider's business, and the shaking of the gorse and the heather, until good health had grown out of thoughtlessness. The very sight of my father was as a hive of humming troubles.

His intense anxiety about me reflected in my mind the endless worry I had concerning him. It was the intellect which condemned him when he wore a joyful air, and the sensations when he waxed over-solicitous. Whether or not the sentences were just, the judges should have sometimes shifted places. I was unable to divine why he fevered me so much. Must I say it?—He had ceased to entertain me. Instead of a comic I found him a tragic spectacle; and his exuberant anticipations, his bursting hopes that fed their forcing-bed with the blight and decay of their predecessors, his transient fits of despair after a touch at my pulses, and exclamation of 'Oh, Richie, Richie, if only I had my boy up and well!'—assuming that nothing but my tardy recovery stood in the way of our contentment—were examples of downright unreason such as contemplation through the comic glass would have excused; the tragic could not. I knew, nevertheless, that to the rest of the world he was a progressive comedy: and the knowledge made him seem more tragic still. He clearly could not learn from misfortune; he was not to be contained. Money I gave him freely, holding the money at my disposal his own; I chafed at his unteachable spirit, surely one of the most tragical things in life; and the proof of my love for him was that I thought it so, though I should have been kinder had he amused me, as in the old days.

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Conceive to yourself the keeping watch over a fountain choked in its spouting, incessantly labouring to spin a jet into the air; now for a moment glittering and towering in a column, and once more straining to mount. My father appeared to me in that and other images. He would have had me believe him shooting to his zenith, victorious at last. I likewise was to reap a victory of the highest kind from the attack of the mysterious ruffians; so much; he said, he thought he could assure me of. He chattered of an intimidated Government, and Dettermain and Newson; duchesses, dukes, most friendly; innumerable invitations to country castles; and among other things one which really showed him to be capable of conceiving ideas and working from an initiative. But this, too, though it accomplished a temporary service, he rendered illusory to me by his unhappy manner of regarding it as an instance of his now permanent social authority. He had instituted what he called his *Jury of honour court*, composed of the select gentlemen of the realm, ostensibly to weigh the causes of disputes between members of their class, and decree the method of settlement: but actually, my father admitted, to put a stop to the affair between Edbury and me.

'That was the origin of the notion, Richie. I carried it on. I dined some of the best men of our day. I seized the opportunity when our choicest "emperor" was rolling on wheels to propound my system. I mention the names of Bramham DeWitt, Colonel Hibbert Segrave, Lord Alonzo Carr, Admiral Loftus, the Earl of Luton, the Marquis of Hatchford, Jack Hippony, Montez Williams,—I think you know him?—and little Dick Phillimore, son of a big-wig, a fellow of a capital wit and discretion; I mention them as present to convince you we are not triflers, dear boy. My argument ran, it is absurd to fight; also it is intolerable to be compelled to submit to insult. As the case stands, we are under a summary edict of the citizens, to whom chivalry is unknown. Well, well, I delivered a short speech. Fighting, I said, resembled butting,— a performance proper to creatures that grow horns instead of brains . . . not to allude to a multitude of telling remarks; and the question "Is man a fighting animal?" my answer being that he is not born with spurs on his heels or horns to his head and that those who insisted on fighting should be examined by competent anatomists, "ologists" of some sort, to decide whether they have the excrescences, and proclaim them . . . touching on these lighter parts of my theme with extreme delicacy. But— and here I dwelt on my point: Man, if not a fighting animal in his glorious—I forgot what—is a sensitive one, and has the idea of honour. "Hear," from Colonel Segrave, and Sir Weeton Slaterhe was one of the party. In fine, Richie, I found myself wafted into a breathing oration. I cannot, I confess it humbly, hear your "hear, hear," without going up and off, inflated like

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a balloon. "Shall the arbitration of the magistracy, indemnifications in money awarded by the Law-courts, succeed in satisfying,"—but I declare to you, Richie, it was no platform speech. I know your term—"the chaincable sentence." Nothing of the kind, I assure you. Plain sense, as from gentlemen to gentlemen. We require, I said, a protection that the polite world of Great Britain does not now afford us against the aggressions of the knave, the fool, and the brute. We establish a Court. We do hereby—no, no, not the "hereby"; quite simply, Richie—pledge ourselves—I said some other word not "pledge" to use our utmost authority and influence to exclude from our circles persons refusing to make the reparation of an apology for wanton common insults: we renounce intercourse with men declining, when guilty of provoking the sentiment of hostility, to submit to the jurisdiction of our Court. All I want you to see is the notion. We raise the shield against the cowardly bully which the laws have raised against the bloody one. "And gentlemen," my father resumed his oration, forgetting my sober eye for a minute—"Gentlemen, we are the ultimate Court of Appeal for men who cherish their honour, yet abstain from fastening it like a millstone round the neck of their common-sense." Credit me, Richie, the proposition kindled. We cited Lord Edbury to appear before us, and I tell you we extracted an ample apology to you from that young nobleman. And let me add, one that I, that we, must impose it upon an old son to accept. He does! Come, come. And you shall see, Richie, society shall never repose an inert mass under my leadership. I cure it; I shake it and cure it.'

He promenaded the room, repeating: 'I do not say I am possessed of a panacea,' and bending to my chin as he passed; 'I maintain that I can and do fulfil the duties of my station, which is my element, attained in the teeth of considerable difficulties, as no other man could, be he prince or Prime Minister. Not one,' he flourished, stepping onward. 'And mind you, Richie, this,' he swung round, conscious as ever of the critic in me, though witless to correct his pomp of style, 'this is not self-glorification. I point you facts. I have a thousand schemes—projects. I recognize the value of early misfortune. The particular misfortune of princes born is that they know nothing of the world—babies! I grant you, babies. Now, I do. I have it on my thumbnail. I know its wants. And just as I succeeded in making you a member of our Parliament in assembly, and the husband of an hereditary princess—hear me—so will I make good my original determination to be in myself the fountain of our social laws, and leader. I have never, I believe—to speak conscientiously—failed in a thing I have once determined on.'

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The single wish that I might be a boy again, to find pleasure in his talk, was all that remained to combat the distaste I had for such oppressive deliveries of a mind apparently as little capable of being seated as a bladder charged with gas. I thanked him for getting rid of Edbury, and a touch of remorse pricked me, it is true, on his turning abruptly and saying: 'You see me in my nakedness, Richie. To you and my valet, the heart, the body!' He was too sympathetic not to have a keen apprehension of a state of hostility in one whom he loved. If I had inclined to melt, however, his next remark would have been enough to harden me: 'I have fought as many battles, and gained as startling victories as Napoleon Buonaparte; he was an upstart.' The word gave me a jerk.

Sometimes he would indulge me transparently in a political controversy, confessing that my dialectical dexterity went far to make a Radical of him. I had no other amusement, or I should have held my peace. I tried every argument I could think of to prove to him that there was neither honour, nor dignity, nor profit in aiming at titular distinctions not forced upon us by the circumstances of our birth. He kept his position with much sly fencing, approaching shrewdness; and, whatever I might say, I could not deny that a vile old knockknee'd world, tugging its forelock to the look of rank and chink of wealth, backed him, if he chose to be insensible to radical dignity.

'In my time,' said he, 'all young gentlemen were born Tories. The doctor no more expected to see a Radical come into the world from a good family than a radish. But I discern you, my dear boy. Our reigning Families must now be active; they require the discipline I have undergone; and I also dine at aldermen's tables, and lay a foundation-stone—as Jorian says—with the facility of a hen-mother: that should not suffice them. 'Tis not sufficient for me. I lay my stone, eat my dinner, make my complimentary speech—and that is all that is expected of us; but I am fully aware we should do more. We must lead, or we are lost. Ay, and—to quote you a Lord Mayor's barge is a pretty piece of gilt for the festive and luxurious to run up the river Thames in and mark their swans. I am convinced there is something deep in that. But what am I to do? Would you have me frown upon the people? Richie, it is prudent—I maintain it righteous, nay, it is, I affirm positively, sovereign wisdom—to cultivate every flower in the British bosom. Riposte me—have you too many? Say yes, and you pass my guard. You cannot. I fence you there. This British loyalty is, in my estimation, absolutely beautiful. We grow to a head in our old England. The people have an eye! I need no introduction to them. We reciprocate a highly cordial feeling when they line the streets and roads with respectful salutations, and I acknowledge their demonstrative goodwill. These things make us a nation. By heaven, Richie,

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you are, on this occasion, if your dad may tell you so, wrong. I ask pardon for my bluntness; but I put it to you, could we, not travelling as personages in our well-beloved country, count on civility to greet us everywhere? Assuredly not. My position is, that by consenting to their honest enthusiasm, we the identical effect you are perpetually crying out for—we civilize them, we civilize them. Goodness!—a Great Britain without Royalty!

He launched on a series of desolate images. In the end, he at least persuaded himself that he had an idea in his anxiety to cultivate the primary British sentiment.

We moved from town to town along the South coast; but it was vain to hope we might be taken for simple people. Nor was he altogether to blame, except in allowing the national instinct for 'worship and reverence' to air itself unrebuked. I fled to the island. Temple ran down to meet me there, and I heard that Janet had written to him for news of me. He entered our hotel a private person; when he passed out, hats flew off before him. The modest little fellow went along a double line of attentive observers on the pier, and came back, asking me in astonishment who he was supposed to be.

'I petitioned for privacy here!' exclaimed my father. It accounted for the mystery.

Temple knew my feelings, and did but glance at me.

Close upon Temple's arrival we had a strange couple of visitors. 'Mistress Dolly Disher and her husband,' my father introduced them. She called him by one of his Christian names inadvertently at times. The husband was a confectioner, a satisfied shade of a man who reserved the exercise of his will for his business, we learnt; she, a bustling, fresh-faced woman of forty-five, with still expressive dark eyes, and, I guessed, the ideal remainder of a passion in her bosom. The guess was no great hazard. She was soon sitting beside me, telling me of the 'years' she had known my father, and of the most affectionate friend and perfect gentleman he was of the ladies who had been in love with him; 'no wonder': and of his sorrows and struggles, and his beautiful voice, and hearts that bled for him; and of one at least who prayed and trusted he would be successful at last.

Temple and the pallid confectioner spent the day on board a yacht with my father. Mrs. Dolly stayed to nurse me and persuade me to swallow medicine. She talked of her youth, when, as a fashionable bootmaker's daughter, she permitted no bills to be sent in to Mr. Richmond, alleging, as a sufficient reason for it to her father, that their family came from Richmond in Yorkshire. Eventually, the bills were always paid. She had not been able to manage her husband so well; and the consequence was, that (she breathed low) an execution was out; 'though I tell him,' she said tremulously, 'he 's sure

to be paid in the long run, if only he'll wait. But no; he is you cannot think how obstinate in his

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business. And my girl Augusta waiting for Mr. Roy Richmond, the wish of our hearts! to assist at her wedding; and can we ask it, and have an execution hanging over him? And for all my husband's a guest here, he's as likely as not to set the officers at work, do what I will, to-morrow or any day. Your father invited us, Mr. Harry. I forced my husband to come, hoping against hope; for your papa gave the orders, relying on me, as he believed he might, and my husband undertook them, all through me. There it stops; he hears reports, and he takes fright: in goes the bill: then it's law, and last Oh! I'm ashamed.'

Mr. Disher's bill was for supplying suppers to the Balls. He received my cheque for the amount in full, observing that he had been confident his wife was correct when she said it would be paid, but a tradesman's business was to hasten the day of payment; and, for a penance, he himself would pacify the lawyers.

On hearing of the settlement of Mr. Disher's claim, my father *ahem'd*, speechless, which was a sign of his swallowing vexation. He remarked that I had, no doubt with the best intentions, encroached on his liberty. 'I do not like to have my debts disturbed.' He put it to me, whether a man, carrying out a life-long plan, would not be disconcerted by the friendliest intervention. This payment to Disher he pronounced fatal in policy. 'You have struck a heavy blow to my credit, Richie. Good little Mistress Dolly brought the man down here—no select addition to our society—and we were doing our utmost to endure him, as the ladies say, for the very purpose . . . but the error stands committed! For the future, friend Disher will infallibly expect payments within the year. Credit for suppers is the guarantee of unlimited entertainments. And I was inspiring him with absolute confidence for next year's campaign. Money, you are aware, is no longer a question to terrify me. I hold proofs that I have conclusively frightened Government, and you know it. But this regards the manipulation of the man Disher. He will now dictate to me. A refresher of a few hundreds would have been impolitic to this kind of man; but the entire sum! and to a creditor in arms! You reverse the proper situations of gentleman and tradesman. My supperman, in particular, should be taught to understand that he is bound up in my success. Something frightened him; he proceeded at law; and now we have shown him that he has frightened us. An execution? My dear boy, I have danced an execution five years running, and ordered, consecutively, at the same house. Like other matters, an execution depends upon how you treat it. The odds are that we have mortally offended Mistress Dolly.' He apologized for dwelling on the subject, with the plea that it was an essential part of his machinery of action, and the usual comparison of 'the sagacious General' whose forethought omitted no minutiae. I had to listen.

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The lady professed to be hurt. The payment, however, put an end to the visit of this couple. Politic or not, it was a large sum to disburse, and once more my attention became fixed on the probable display of figures in my bankers' book. Bonds and bills were falling due: the current expenses were exhausting. I tried to face the evil, and take a line of conduct, staggering, as I did on my feet. Had I been well enough, I believe I should have gone to my grandfather, to throw myself on his good-nature; such was the brain's wise counsel: but I was all nerves and alarms, insomuch that I interdicted Temple's writing to Janet, lest it should bring on me letters from my aunt Dorothy, full of advice that could no longer be followed, well-meant cautions that might as well be addressed to the mile-posts behind me. Moreover, Janet would be flying on the wind to me, and I had a craving for soft arms and the look of her eyebrows, that warned me to keep her off if I intended to act as became a man of good faith.

Fair weather, sunny green sea-water speckled with yachts shooting and bounding, and sending me the sharp sense of life there is in dashed-up fountains of silvery salt-spray, would have quickened my blood sooner but for this hot-bed of fruitless adventure, tricky precepts, and wisdom turned imp, in which my father had again planted me. To pity him seemed a childish affectation. His praise of my good looks pleased me, for on that point he was fitted to be a judge, and I was still fancying I had lost them on the heath. Troops of the satellites of his grand parade surrounded him. I saw him walk down the pier like one breaking up a levee. At times he appeared to me a commanding phantasm in the midst of phantasm figures of great ladies and their lords, whose names he told off on his return like a drover counting his herd; but within range of his eye and voice the reality of him grew overpowering. It seduced me, and, despite reason, I began to feel warm under his compliments. He was like wine. Gaiety sprang under his feet. Sitting at my window, I thirsted to see him when he was out of sight, and had touches of the passion of my boyhood.

I listened credulously, too, as in the old days, when he repeated, 'You will find I am a magician, and very soon, Richie, mark me.' His manner hinted that there was a surprise in store. 'You have not been on the brink of the grave for nothing.' He resembled wine in the other conditions attached to its rare qualities. Oh for the choice of having only a little of him, instead of having him on my heart! The unfilial wish attacked me frequently: he could be, and was, so ravishing to strangers and light acquaintances. Did by chance a likeness exist between us? My sick fancy rushed to the Belthams for a denial. There did, of some sort, I knew; and the thought partitioned my dreamy ideas, of which the noblest, taking advantage of my physical weakness, compelled me to confess that it was a vain delusion

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for one such as I to hope for Ottilia. This looking at the roots of yourself, if you are possessed of a nobler half that will do it, is a sound corrective of an excessive ambition. Unfortunately it would seem that young men can do it only in sickness. With the use of my legs, and open-air breathing, I became compact, and as hungry and zealous on behalf of my individuality, as proud of it as I had ever been: prouder and hungrier.

My first day of outing, when, looking at every face, I could reflect on the miraculous issue of mine almost clear from its pummelling, and above all, that my nose was safe—not stamped with the pugilist's brand—inspired a lyrical ebullition of gratitude. Who so intoxicated as the convalescent catching at health?

I met Charles Etherell on the pier, and heard that my Parliamentary seat was considered in peril, together with a deal of gossip about my disappearance.

My father, who was growing markedly restless, on the watch for letters and new arrivals, started to pay Chippenden a flying visit. He begged me urgently to remain for another few days, while he gathered information, saying my presence at his chief quarters did him infinite service, and I always thought that possible. I should find he was a magician, he repeated, with a sort of hesitating fervour.

I had just waved my hand to him as the boat was bearing him away from the pier-head, when a feminine voice murmured in my ear, 'Is not this our third meeting, Mr. Harry Richmond?—Venice, Elbestadt, and the Isle of Wight?' She ran on, allowing me time to recognize Clara Goodwin. 'What was your last adventure? You have been ill. Very ill? Has it been serious?'

I made light of it. 'No: a tumble.'

'You look pale,' she said quickly.

'That's from grieving at the loss of my beauty, Miss Goodwin.'

'Have you really not been seriously ill?' she asked with an astonishing eagerness.

I told her mock-loftily that I did not believe in serious illnesses coming to godlike youth, and plied her in turn with inquiries.

'You have not been laid up in bed?' she persisted.

'No, on my honour, not in bed.'

'Then,' said she, 'I would give much to be able to stop that boat.'

She amazed me. 'Why?'

'Because it's going on a bad errand,' she replied.

'Miss Goodwin, you perplex me. My father has started in that boat.'

'Yes, I saw him.' She glanced hastily at the foam in a way to show indifference. 'What I am saying concerns others . . . who have heard you were dangerously ill. I have sent for them to hasten across.'

'My aunt and Miss Ilchester?'

'No.'

'Who are they? Miss Goodwin, I'll answer any question. I've been queerish, that's true. Now let me hear who they are, when you arrived, when you expect them. Where are they now?'

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'As to me,' she responded with what stretched on my ears like an insufferable drawl, 'I came over last night to hire a furnished house or lodgings. Papa has an appointment attached to the fortifications yonder. We'll leave the pier, if you please. You draw too much attention on ladies who venture to claim acquaintance with so important a gentleman.'

We walked the whole length of the pier, chatting of our former meetings.

'Not here,' she said, as soon as I began to question.

I was led farther on, half expecting that the accessories of time and place would have to do with the revelation.

The bitter creature drew me at her heels into a linendraper's shop. There she took a seat, pitched her voice to the key of a lady's at a dinner-table, when speaking to her cavalier of the history or attire of some one present, and said, 'You are sure the illness was not at all feigned?'

She had me as completely at her mercy in this detestable shop as if I had been in a witness-box.

'Feigned!' I exclaimed.

'That is no answer. And pray remember where you are.'

'No, the illness was not feigned.'

'And you have not made the most of it?'

'What an extraordinary thing to say!'

'That is no answer. And please do not imagine yourself under the necessity of acting every sentiment of your heart before these people.'

She favoured a shopman with half-a-dozen directions.

'My answer is, then, that I have not made the most of it,' I said.

'Not even by proxy?'

'Once more I'm adrift.'

'You are certainly energetic. I must address you as a brother, or it will be supposed we are quarrelling. Harry, do you like that pattern?'

'Yes. What's the meaning of proxy?'

'With the accent you give it, heaven only knows what it means. I would rather you did not talk here like a Frenchman relating his last love-affair in company.

Must your voice escape control exactly at the indicatory words? Do you think your father made the most of it?

'Of my illness? Oh! yes; the utmost. I should undoubtedly think so. That's his way.'

'Why did you permit it?'

'I was what they call "wandering" half the time. Besides, who could keep him in check? I rarely know what he is doing.'

'You don't know what he wrote?'

'Wrote?'

'That you were dying.'

'Of me? To whom?'

She scrutinized me, and rose from her chair. 'I must try some other shop. How is it, that if these English people cannot make a "berthe" fit to wear, they do not conceive the idea of importing such things from Paris? I will take your arm, Harry.'

'You have bought nothing,' I remarked.

'I have as much as I went for,' she replied, and gravely thanked the assistant leaning on his thumbs across the counter; after which, dropping the graceless play of an enigma, she inquired whether I had forgotten the Frau von Dittmarsch.



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I had, utterly; but not her maiden name of Sibley.

'Miss Goodwin, is she one of those who are coming to the island?'

'Frau von Dittmarsch? Yes. She takes an interest in you. She and I have been in correspondence ever since my visit to Sarkeld. It reminds me, you may vary my maiden name with the Christian, if you like. Harry, I believe you are truthful as ever, in spite—'

'Don't be unjust,' said I.

'I wish I could think I was!' she rejoined. 'Frau von Dittmarsch was at Sarkeld, and received terrible news of you. She called on me, at my father's residence over the water yonder, yesterday afternoon, desiring greatly to know—she is as cautious as one with a jewel in her custody— how it fared with you, whether you were actually in a dying state. I came here to learn; I have friends here: you were not alone, or I should have called on you. The rumour was that you were very ill; so I hired a furnished place for Frau von Dittmarsch at once. But when I saw you and him together, and the parting between you, I began to have fears; I should have countermanded the despatch I sent by the boat, had it been possible.'

'It has gone! And tell me the name of the other.'

'Frau von Dittmarsch has a husband.'

'Not with her now. Oh! cruel! speak: her name?'

'Her name, Harry?' Her title is Countess von Delzenburg.'

'Not princess?'

'Not in England.'

Then Ottilia was here!

My father was indeed a magician!

CHAPTER XLVIII

THE PRINCESS ENTRAPPED

'Not princess in England,' could betoken but one thing—an incredible act of devotion, so great that it stunned my senses, and I thought of it, and of all it involved, before the vision of Ottilia crossing seas took possession of me.



'The Princess Ottilia, Miss Goodwin?'

'The Countess of Delzenburg, Harry.'

'To see me? She has come!'

'Harry, you talk like the boy you were when we met before you knew her. Yes and yes to everything you have to say, but I think you should spare her name.'

'She comes thinking me ill?'

'Dying.'

'I'm as strong as ever I was.'

'I should imagine you are, only rather pale.'

'Have you, tell me, Clara, seen her yourself? Is she well?'

'Pale: not unwell: anxious.'

'About me?'

'It may be about the political affairs of the Continent; they are disturbed.'

'She spoke of me?'

'Yes.'

'She is coming by the next boat?'

'It's my fear that she is.'

'Why do you fear?'

'Shall I answer you, Harry? It is useless now. Well, because she has been deceived. That is why. You will soon find it out.'

'Prince Ernest is at Sarkeld?'

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'In Paris, I hear.'

'How will your despatch reach these ladies in time for them to come over by the next boat?'

'I have sent my father's servant. The General—he is promoted at last, Harry—attends the ladies in person, and is now waiting for the boat's arrival over there, to follow my directions.'

'You won't leave me?'

Miss Goodwin had promised to meet the foreign ladies on the pier. We quarrelled and made it up a dozen times like girl and boy, I calling her aunt Clara, as in the old days, and she calling me occasionally son Richie: an imitation of my father's manner of speech to me when we formed acquaintance first in Venice. But I was very little aware of what I was saying or doing. The forces of my life were yoked to the heart, and tumbled as confusedly as the world under Phaethon charioteer. We walked on the heights above the town. I looked over the water to the white line of shore and batteries where this wonder stood, who was what poets dream of, deep-hearted men hope for, none quite believe in. Hardly could I; and though my relenting spinster friend at my elbow kept assuring me it was true that she was there, my sceptical sight fixed on the stale prominences visible in the same features which they had worn day after empty day of late. This deed of hers was an act of devotion great as death. I knew it from experience consonant to Ottilia's character; but could a princess, hereditary, and bound in the league of governing princes, dare so to brave her condition? Complex of mind, simplest in character, the uncontrollable nobility of her spirit was no sooner recognized by me than I was shocked throughout by a sudden light, contrasting me appallingly with this supreme of women, who swept the earth aside for truth. I had never before received a distinct intimation of my littleness of nature, and my first impulse was to fly from thought, and then, as if to prove myself justly accused, I caught myself regretting—no, not regretting, gazing, as it were, on a picture of regrets—that Ottilia was not a romantic little lady of semi-celestial rank, exquisitely rash, wilful, desperately enamoured, bearing as many flying hues and peeps of fancy as a love-ballad, and not more roughly brushing the root-emotions.

If she had but been such an one, what sprightly colours, delicious sadness, magical transformations, tenderest intermixture of earth and heaven; what tears and sunbeams, divinest pathos: what descents from radiance to consolatory twilight, would have surrounded me for poetry and pride to dwell on! What captivating melody in the minor key would have been mine, though I lost her—the legacy of it all for ever! Say a petulant princess, a star of beauty, mad for me, and the whisper of our passion and sorrows traversing the flushed world! Was she coming? Not she, but a touchstone, a relentless mirror, a piercing eye, a mind severe as the Goddess of the God's head: a princess indeed, but essentially a princess

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above women: a remorseless intellect, an actual soul visible in the flesh. She was truth. Was I true? Not so very false, yet how far from truth! The stains on me (a modern man writing his history is fugitive and crepuscular in alluding to them, as a woman kneeling at the ear-guichet) burnt like the blood-spots on the criminal compelled to touch his victim by savage ordinance, which knew the savage and how to search him. And these were faults of weakness rather than the sins of strength. I might as fairly hope for absolution of them from Ottilia as from offended laws of my natural being, gentle though she was, and charitable.

Was I not guilty of letting her come on to me hoodwinked at this moment? I had a faint memory of Miss Goodwin's saying that she had been deceived, and I suggested a plan of holding aloof until she had warned the princess of my perfect recovery, to leave it at her option to see me.

'Yes,' Miss Goodwin assented: 'if you like, Harry.'

Her compassion for me only tentatively encouraged the idea. 'It would, perhaps, be right. You are the judge. If you can do it. You are acting bravely.' She must have laughed at me in her heart.

The hours wore on. My curse of introspection left me, and descending through the town to the pier, amid the breezy blue skirts and bonnet-strings, we watched the packet-boat approaching. There was in advance one of the famous swift island wherries. Something went wrong with it, for it was overtaken, and the steamer came in first. I jumped on board, much bawled at. Out of a crowd of unknown visages, Janet appeared: my aunt Dorothy was near her. The pair began chattering of my paleness, and wickedness in keeping my illness unknown to them. They had seen Temple on an excursion to London; he had betrayed me, as he would have betrayed an archangel to Janet.

'Will you not look at us, Harry?' they both said.

The passengers were quitting the boat, strangers every one.

'Harry, have we really offended you in coming?' said Janet.

My aunt Dorothy took the blame on herself.

I scarcely noticed them, beyond leading them on to the pier-steps and leaving them under charge of Miss Goodwin, who had, in matters of luggage and portage, the practical mind and aplomb of an Englishwoman that has passed much of her time on the Continent. I fancied myself vilely duped by this lady. The boat was empty of its passengers; a grumbling pier-man, wounded in his dignity, notified to me that there

were fines for disregard of the Company's rules and regulations. His tone altered; he touched his hat: 'Didn't know who you was, my lord.' Janet overheard him, and her face was humorous.

'We may break the rules, you see,' I said to her.

'We saw him landing on the other side of the water,' she replied; so spontaneously did the circumstance turn her thoughts on my father.

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'Did you speak to him?'

'No.'

'You avoided him?'

'Aunt and I thought it best. He landed . . . there was a crowd.'

Miss Goodwin interposed: 'You go to Harry's hotel?'

'Grandada is coming down to-morrow or next day,' Janet prompted my aunt Dorothy.

'If we could seek for a furnished house; Uberly would watch the luggage,' Dorothy murmured in distress.

'Furnished houses, even rooms at hotels, are doubtful in the height of the season,' Miss Goodwin remarked. 'Last night I engaged the only decent set of rooms I could get, for friends of Harry's who are coming.'

'No wonder he was disappointed at seeing us—he was expecting them!' said Janet, smiling a little.

'They are sure to come,' said Miss Goodwin.

Near us a couple of yachtsmen were conversing.

'Oh, he'll be back in a day or two,' one said. 'When you 've once tasted that old boy, you can't do without him. I remember when I was a youngster—it was in Lady Betty Bolton's day; she married old Edbury, you know, first wife—the Magnificent was then in his prime. He spent his money in a week: so he hired an eighty-ton schooner; he laid violent hands on a Jew, bagged him, lugged him on board, and sailed away.'

'What the deuce did he want with a Jew?' cried the other.

'Oh, the Jew supplied cheques for a three months' cruise in the Mediterranean, and came home, I heard, very good friends with his pirate. That's only one of dozens.'

The unconscious slaughterers laughed.

'On another occasion'—I heard it said by the first speaker, as they swung round to parade the pier, and passed on narrating.

'Not an hotel, if it is possible to avoid it,' my aunt Dorothy, with heightened colour, urged Miss Goodwin. They talked together.

'Grandada is coming to you, Harry,' Janet said. 'He has business in London, or he would have been here now. Our horses and carriages follow us: everything you would like. He does love you! he is very anxious. I'm afraid his health is worse than he thinks. Temple did not say your father was here, but grandada must have suspected it when he consented to our coming, and said he would follow us. So that looks well perhaps. He has been much quieter since your money was paid back to you. If they should meet . . . no, I hope they will not: grandada hates noise. And, Harry, let me tell you: it may be nothing: if he questions you, do not take fire; just answer plainly: I'm sure you understand. One in a temper at a time I'm sure 's enough: you have only to be patient with him. He has been going to London, to the City, seeing lawyers, bankers, brokers, and coming back muttering. Ah! dear old man. And when he ought to have peace! Harry, the poor will regret him in a thousand places. I write a great deal for him now, and I know how they will. What are you looking at?'

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I was looking at a man of huge stature, of the stiffest build, whose shoulders showed me their full breadth while he stood displaying frontwards the open of his hand in a salute.

'Schwartz!' I called. Janet started, imagining some fierce interjection. The giant did not stir.

But others had heard. A lady stepped forward. 'Dear Mr. Harry Richmond! Then you are better? We had most alarming news of you.'

I bowed to the Frau von Dittmarsch, anciently Miss Sibley.

'The princess?'

'She is here.'

Frau von Dittmarsch clasped Miss Goodwin's hand. I was touching Otilia's. A veil partly swathed her face. She trembled: the breeze robbed me of her voice.

Our walk down the pier was almost in silence. Miss Goodwin assumed the guardianship of the foreign ladies. I had to break from them and provide for my aunt Dorothy and Janet.

'They went over in a little boat, they were so impatient. Who is she?' Dorothy Beltham asked.

'The Princess Otilia,' said Janet.

'Are you certain? Is it really, Harry?'

I confirmed it, and my aunt said, 'I should have guessed it could be no other; she has a foreign grace.'

'General Goodwin was with them when the boat came in from the island,' said Janet. 'He walked up to Harry's father, and you noticed, aunty, that the ladies stood away, as if they wished to be unobserved, as we did, and pulled down their veils. They would not wait for our boat. We passed them crossing. People joked about the big servant overweighing the wherry.'

Dorothy Beltham thought the water too rough for little boats.

'She knows what a sea is,' I said.

Janet gazed steadily after the retreating figures, and then commended me to the search for rooms. The end of it was that I abandoned my father's suite to them. An

accommodating linen-draper possessed of a sea-view, and rooms which hurled the tenant to the windows in desire for it, gave me harbourage.

Till dusk I scoured the town to find Miss Goodwin, without whom there was no clue to the habitation I was seeking, and I must have passed her blindly again and again. My aunt Dorothy and Janet thanked me for my consideration in sitting down to dine with them; they excused my haste to retire. I heard no reproaches except on account of my not sending them word of my illness. Janet was not warm. She changed in colour and voice when I related what I had heard from Miss Goodwin, namely, that 'some one' had informed the princess I was in a dying state. I was obliged to offer up my father as a shield for Ottilia, lest false ideas should tarnish the image of her in their minds. Janet did not speak of him. The thought stood in her eyes; and there lies the evil of a sore subject among persons of one household: they have not to speak to exhibit their minds.

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After a night of suspense I fell upon old Schwartz and Aennchen out in the earliest dawn, according to their German habits, to have a gaze at sea, and strange country and people. Aennchen was all wonder at the solitary place, Schwartz at the big ships. But when they tried to direct me to the habitation of their mistress, it was discovered by them that they had lost their bearings. Aennchen told me the margravine had been summoned to Rippau just before they left Sarkeld. Her mistress had informed Baroness Turckems of her intention to visit England. Prince Ernest was travelling in France.

The hour which brought me to Ottilia was noon. The arrangements of the ladies could only grant me thirty minutes, for Janet was to drive the princess out into the country to view the island. She and my aunt Dorothy had been already introduced. Miss Goodwin, after presenting them, insisted upon ceremoniously accompanying me to the house. Quite taking the vulgar view of a proceeding such as the princess had been guilty of, and perhaps fearing summary audacity and interestedness in the son of a father like mine, she ventured on lecturing me, as though it lay with me to restrain the fair romantic head, forbear from calling up my special advantages, advise, and stand to the wisdom of this world, and be the man of honour. The princess had said: 'Not see him when I have come to him?' I reassured my undiscerning friend partly, not wholly.

'Would it be commonly sensible or civil, to refuse to see me, having come?'

Miss Goodwin doubted.

I could indicate forcibly, because I felt, the clear-judging brain and tempered self-command whereby Ottilia had gained her decision.

Miss Goodwin nodded and gave me the still-born affirmative of politeness. Her English mind expressed itself willing to have exonerated the rash great lady for visiting a dying lover, but he was not the same person now that he was on his feet, consequently her expedition wore a different aspect:—my not dying condemned her. She entreated me to keep the fact of the princess's arrival unknown to my father, on which point we were one. Intensely enthusiastic for the men of her race, she would have me, above all things, by a form of adjuration designed to be a masterpiece of persuasive rhetoric, 'prove myself an Englishman.' I was to show that 'the honour, interests, reputation and position of any lady (demented or not,' she added) 'were as precious to me as to the owner': that 'no woman was ever in peril of a shadow of loss in the hands of an English gentleman,' and so forth, rather surprisingly to me, remembering her off-hand manner of the foregoing day. But the sense of responsibility thrown upon her ideas of our superior national dignity had awakened her fervid naturalness—made her a different person, as we say when accounting, in our fashion, for what a little added heat may do.

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The half hour allotted to me fled. I went from the room and the house, feeling that I had seen and heard her who was barely of the world of humankind for me, so strongly did imagination fly with her. I kissed her fingers, I gazed in her eyes, I heard the beloved voice. All passed too swift for happiness. Recollections set me throbbing, but recollection brought longing. She said, 'Now I have come I must see you, Harry.' Did it signify that to see me was a piece of kindness at war with her judgement? She rejoiced at my perfect recovery, though it robbed her of the plea in extenuation of this step she had taken. She praised me for abstaining to write to her, when I was stammering a set of hastily-impressed reasons to excuse myself for the omission. She praised my step into Parliament. It did not seem to involve a nearer approach to her. She said, 'You have not wasted your time in England.' It was for my solitary interests that she cared, then.

I brooded desperately. I could conceive an overlooking height that made her utterance simple and consecutive: I could not reach it. Topics which to me were palpitating, had no terror for her. She said, 'I have offended my father; I have written to him; he will take me away.' In speaking of the letter which had caused her to offend, she did not blame the writer. I was suffered to run my eyes over it, and was ashamed. It read to me too palpably as an outcry to delude and draw her hither:—pathos and pathos: the father holding his dying son in his arms, his sole son, Harry Richmond; the son set upon by enemies in the night: the lover never daring to beg for a sight of his beloved ere he passed away:—not an ill-worded letter; read uncritically, it may have been touching: it must have been, though it was the reverse for me. I frowned, broke down in regrets, under sharp humiliation.

She said, 'You knew nothing of it. A little transgression is the real offender. When we are once out of the way traced for us, we are in danger of offending at every step; we are as lawless as the outcasts.' That meant, 'My turning aside to you originally was the blameable thing.' It might mean, 'My love of you sets my ideas of duty at variance with my father's.'

She smiled; nothing was uttered in a tone of despondency. Her high courage and breeding gave her even in this pitfall the smoothness which most women keep for society. Why she had not sent me any message or tidings of herself to Riversley was not a matter that she could imagine to perplex me: she could not imagine my losing faith in her. The least we could do, I construed it, the religious bond between us was a faith in one another that should sanctify to our souls the external injuries it caused us to commit. But she talked in no such strain. Her delight in treading English ground was her happy theme. She said, 'It is as young as when we met in the forest'; namely, the feeling revived for

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England. How far off we were from the green Devonshire coast, was one of her questions, suggestive of our old yacht-voyage lying among her dreams. Excepting an extreme and terrorizing paleness, there was little to fever me with the thought that she suffered mortally. Of reproach, not a word; nor of regret. At the first touch of hands, when we stood together, alone, she said, 'Would hearing of your recovery have given me peace?' My privileges were the touch of hands, the touch of her fingers to my lips, a painless hearing and seeing, and passionate recollection. She said, 'Impatience is not for us, Harry': I was not to see her again before the evening. These were the last words she said, and seemed the lightest until my hot brain made a harvest of them transcending thrice-told vows of love. Did they not mean, 'We two wait': therefore, 'The years are bondmen to our steadfastness.' Could sweeter have been said? They might mean nothing!

She was veiled when Janet drove her out; Janet sitting upright in her masterly way, smoothing her pet ponies with the curl of her whip, chatting and smiling; the princess slightly leaning back. I strode up to the country roads, proud of our land's beauty under a complacent sky. By happy chance, which in a generous mood I ascribed to Janet's good nature, I came across them at a seven miles' distance. They were talking spiritedly: what was wonderful, they gave not much heed to me: they seemed on edge for one another's conversation: each face was turned to the other's, and after nodding an adieu, they resumed the animated discourse. I had been rather in alarm lest Ottilia should think little of Janet. They passed out of sight without recurring to a thought of me behind them.

In the evening I was one among a group of ladies. I had the opportunity of hearing the running interchange between Ottilia and Janet, which appeared to be upon equal terms; indeed, Janet led. The subjects were not very deep. Plain wits, candour, and an unpretending tongue, it seemed, could make common subjects attractive, as fair weather does our English woods and fields. The princess was attracted by something in Janet. I myself felt the sway of something, while observing Ottilia's rapt pleasure in her talk and her laughter, with those funny familiar frowns and current dimples twisting and melting away like a play of shadows on the eddies of the brook.

'I 'm glad to be with her,' Janet said of Ottilia.

It was just in that manner she spoke in Ottilia's presence. Why it should sound elsewhere unsatisfactorily blunt, and there possess a finished charm, I could not understand.

I mentioned to Janet that I feared my father would be returning.

She contained herself with a bridled 'Oh!'

We were of one mind as to the necessity for keeping him absent, if possible.

'Harry, you'll pardon me; I can't talk of him,' said she.

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I proposed half-earnestly to foil his return by going to London at once.

'That's manly; that's nice of you,' Janet said.

This was on our walk from the house at night. My aunt Dorothy listened, pressing my arm. The next morning Janet urged me to go at once. 'Keep him away, bring down grandada, Harry. She cannot quit the island, because she has given Prince Ernest immediate rendezvous here. You must not delay to go. Yes, the Countess of Delzenburg shall have your excuses. And no, I promise you I will run nobody down. Besides, if I do, aunty will be at hand to plead for the defence, and she can! She has a way that binds one to accept everything she says, and Temple ought to study with her for a year or two before he wears his gown. Bring him back with you and grandada. He is esteemed here at his true worth. I love him for making her in love with English boys. I leave the men for those who know them, but English boys are unrivalled, I declare. Honesty, bravery, modesty, and nice looks! They are so nice in their style and their way of talking. I tell her, our men may be shy and sneering,—awkward, I daresay; but our boys beat the world. Do bring down Temple. I should so like her to see a cricket-match between two good elevens of our boys, Harry, while she is in England! We could have arranged for one at Riversley.'

I went, and I repressed the idea, on my way, that Janet had manoeuvred by sending me off to get rid of me, but I felt myself a living testimony to her heartlessness: for no girl of any heart, acting the part of friend, would have allowed me to go without a leave-taking of her I loved few would have been so cruel as to declare it a duty to go at all, especially when the chances were that I might return to find the princess wafted away. Ottilia's condescension had done her no good. 'Turn to the right, that's your path; on.' She seemed to speak in this style, much as she made her touch of the reins understood by her ponies. 'I 'll take every care of the princess,' she said. Her conceit was unbounded. I revelled in contemptuous laughter at her assumption of the post of leader with Ottilia. However, it was as well that I should go: there was no trusting my father.

CHAPTER XLIX

WHICH FORESHADOWS A GENERAL GATHERING

At our Riversley station I observed the squire, in company with Captain Bulsted, jump into a neighbouring carriage. I joined them, and was called upon to answer various inquiries. The squire gave me one of his short tight grasps of the hand, in which there was warmth and shyness, our English mixture. The captain whispered in my ear: 'He oughtn't to be alone.'

'How's the great-grandmother of the tribe?' said I.

Captain Bulsted nodded, as if he understood, but was at sea until I mentioned the bottle of rum and the remarkable length of that old lady's measurement.

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'Ay, to be sure! a grand old soul,' he said. 'You know that scum of old, Harry.'

I laughed, and so did he, at which I laughed the louder.

'He laughs, I suppose, because his party's got a majority in the House,' said the squire.

'We gave you a handsome surplus this year, sir.'

'Sweated out of the country's skin and bone, ay!'

'You were complimented by the Chancellor of the Exchequer.!

'Yes, that fellow's compliments are like a cabman's, and cry fool:—he never thanks you but when he's overpaid.'

Captain Bulsted applauded the sarcasm.

'Why did you keep out of knowledge all this time, Hal?' my grandfather asked.

I referred him to the captain.

'Hang it,' cried Captain Bulsted, 'do you think I'd have been doing duty for you if I'd known where to lay hold of you.'

'Well, if you didn't shake hands with me, you touched my toes,' said I, and thanked him with all my heart for his kindness to an old woman on the point of the grave. I had some fun to flavour melancholy with.

My grandfather resumed his complaint: 'You might have gone clean off, and we none the wiser.'

'Are we quite sure that his head's clean on?' said the mystified captain.

'Of course we should run to him, wherever he was, if he was down on his back,' the squire muttered.

'Ay, ay, sir; of course,' quoth Captain William, frowning to me to reciprocate this relenting mood. 'But, Harry, where did you turn off that night? We sat up expecting you. My poor Julia was in a terrible fright, my lad. Eh? speak up.'

I raised the little finger.

'Oh, oh,' went he, happily reassured; but, reflecting, added: 'A bout of it?'

I dropped him a penitent nod.

'That's bad, though,' said he.

'Then why did you tip me a bottle of rum, Captain William?'

'By George, Harry, you've had a crack o' the sconce,' he exclaimed, more sagaciously than he was aware of.

My grandfather wanted to keep me by his side in London until we two should start for the island next day; but his business was in the city, mine toward the West. We appointed to meet two hours after reaching the terminus.

He turned to me while giving directions to his man.

'You 've got him down there, I suppose?'

'My father's in town, sir. He shall keep away,' I said.

'Humph! I mayn't object to see him.'

This set me thinking.

Captain Bulsted—previously asking me in a very earnest manner whether I was really all right and sound—favoured me with a hint:

'The squire has plunged into speculations of his own, or else he is peeping at somebody else's. No danger of the dad being mixed up with Companies? Let's hope not. Julia pledged her word to Janet that I would look after the old squire. I suppose I can go home this evening? My girl hates to be alone.'

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'By all means,' said I; and the captain proposed to leave the squire at his hotel, in the event of my failing to join him in the city.

'But don't fail, if you can help it,' he urged me; 'for things somehow, my dear Harry, appear to me to look like the compass when the needle gives signs of atmospheric disturbance. My only reason for saying so is common observation. You can judge for yourself that he is glad to have you with him.'

I told the captain I was equally glad; for, in fact, my grandfather's quietness and apparently friendly disposition tempted me to petition for a dower for the princess at once, so that I might be in the position to offer Prince Ernest on his arrival a distinct alternative; supposing— it was still but a supposition—Otilia should empower me. Incessant dialogues of perpetually shifting tendencies passed between Otilia and me in my brain—now dark, now mildly fair, now very wild, on one side at least. Never, except by downright force of will, could I draw from the phantom of her one purely irrational outcry, so deeply-rooted was the knowledge of her nature and mind; and when I did force it, I was no gainer: a puppet stood in her place—the vision of Otilia melted out in threads of vapour.

'And yet she has come to me; she has braved everything to come.' I might say that, to liken her to the women who break rules and read duties by their own light, but I could not cheat my knowledge of her. Mrs. Waddy met me in the hall of my father's house, as usual, pressing, I regretted to see, one hand to her side. 'Her heart,' she said, 'was easily set pitty-pat now.' She had been, by her master's orders, examined by two of the chief physicians of the kingdom, 'baronets both.' They advised total rest. As far as I could apprehend, their baronetcies and doings in high regions had been of more comfort than their prescriptions.

'What I am I must be,' she said, meekly; 'and I cannot quit his service till he's abroad again, or I drop. He has promised me a monument. I don't want it; but it shows his kindness.'

A letter from Heriot informed me that the affair between Edbury and me was settled: he could not comprehend how.

'What is this new Jury of Honour? Who are the jurymen?' he asked, and affected wit.

I thanked him for a thrashing in a curt reply.

My father had left the house early in the morning. Mrs. Waddy believed that he meant to dine that evening at the season's farewell dinner of the Trump-Trick Club: 'Leastways, Tollingby has orders to lay out his gentlemen's-dinners' evening-suit. Yesterday afternoon he flew down to Chippenden, and was home late. To-day he's in the City, or one of the squares. Lady Edbury's—ah! detained in town with the jaundice

or toothache. He said he was sending to France for a dentist: or was it Germany, for some lady's eyes? I am sure I don't know. Well or ill, so long as you're anything to him, he will abound. Pocket and purse! You know him by this time, Mr. Harry. Oh, my heart!

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A loud knock at the door had brought on the poor creature's palpitations.

This visitor was no other than Prince Ernest. The name on his card was Graf von Delzenburg, and it set my heart leaping to as swift a measure as Mrs. Waddy's.

Hearing that I was in the house, he desired to see me.

We met, with a formal bow.

'I congratulate you right heartily upon being out of the list of the nekron,' he said, civilly. 'I am on my way to one of your watering-places, whither my family should have preceded me. Do you publish the names and addresses of visitors daily, as it is the custom with us?'

I relieved his apprehensions on that head: 'Here and there, rarely; and only at the hotels, I believe.' The excuse was furnished for offering the princess's address.

'Possibly, in a year or two, we may have the pleasure of welcoming you at Sarkeld,' said the prince, extending his hand. 'Then, you have seen the Countess of Delzenburg?'

'On the day of her arrival, your Highness. Ladies of my family are staying on the island.'

'Ah?'

He paused, and invited me to bow to him. We bowed thus in the room, in the hall, and at the street-door.

For what purpose could he have called on my father? To hear the worst at once? That seemed likely, supposing him to have lost his peculiar confidence in the princess, of which the courtly paces he had put me through precluded me from judging.

But I guessed acutely that it was not his intention to permit of my meeting Ottilia a second time. The blow was hard: I felt it as if it had been struck already, and thought I had gained resignation, until, like a man reprieved on his road to execution, the narrowed circle of my heart opened out to the breadth of the world in a minute. Returning from the city, I hurried to my father's house, late in the afternoon, and heard that he had started to overtake the prince, leaving word that the prince was to be found at his address in the island. No doubt could exist regarding the course I was bound to take. I drove to my grandfather, stated my case to him, and by sheer vehemence took the wind out of his sails; so that when I said, 'I am the only one alive who can control my father,' he answered mildly, 'Seems t' other way,' and chose a small snort for the indulgence of his private opinion.

'What! this princess came over alone, and is down driving out with my girl under an alias?' he said, showing sour aversion at the prospect of a collision with the foreign species, as expressive as the ridge of a cat's back.

Temple came to dine with us, so I did not leave him quite to himself, and Temple promised to accompany him down to the island.

'Oh, go, if you like,' the fretted old man dismissed me:

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'I've got enough to think over. Hold him fast to stand up to me within forty-eight hours, present time; you know who I mean; I've got a question or two for him. How he treats his foreign princes and princesses don't concern me. I'd say, like the Prevention-Cruelty-Animal's man to the keeper of the menagerie, "Lecture 'em, wound their dignity, hurt their feelings, only don't wop 'em." I don't wish any harm to them, but what the deuce they do here nosing after my grandson! . . . There, go; we shall be having it out ha' done with to-morrow or next day. I've run the badger to earth, else I'm not fit to follow a scent.'

He grumbled at having to consume other than his Riversley bread, butter, beef, and ale for probably another fortnight. One of the boasts of Riversley was, that while the rest of the world ate and drank poison, the Grange lived on its own solid substance, defying malefactory Radical tricksters.

Temple was left to hear the rest. He had the sweetest of modest wishes for a re-introduction to Ottilia.

CHAPTER L

WE ARE ALL IN MY FATHER'S NET

Journeying down by the mail-train in the face of a great sunken sunset broken with cloud, I chanced to ask myself what it was that I seriously desired to have. My purpose to curb my father was sincere and good; but concerning my heart's desires, whitherward did they point? I thought of Janet—she made me gasp for air; of Ottilia, and she made me long for earth. Sharp, as I write it, the distinction smote me. I might have been divided by an electrical shot into two halves, with such an equal force was I drawn this way and that, pointing nowhither. To strangle the thought of either one of them was like the pang of death; yet it did not strike me that I loved the two: they were apart in my mind, actually as if I had been divided. I passed the Riversley station under sombre sunset fires, saddened by the fancy that my old home and vivacious Janet were ashes, past hope. I came on the smell of salt air, and had that other spirit of woman around me, of whom the controlled seadeeps were an image, who spoke to my soul like starlight. Much wise counsel, and impatience of the wisdom, went on within me. I walked like a man with a yawning wound, and had to whip the sense of passion for a drug. Toward which one it strove I know not; it was blind and stormy as the night.

Not a boatman would take me across. The lights of the island lay like a crown on the water. I paced the ramparts, eyeing them, breathing the keen salt of thundering waves, until they were robbed of their magic by the coloured Fast.

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It is, I have learnt, out of the conflict of sensations such as I then underwent that a young man's brain and morality, supposing him not to lean overmuch to sickly sentiment, becomes gradually enriched and strengthened, and himself shaped for capable manhood. I was partly conscious of a better condition in the morning; and a sober morning it was to me after my long sentinel's step to and fro. I found myself possessed of one key—whether the right one or not—wherewith to read the princess, which was never possible to me when I was under stress of passion, or of hope or despair; my perplexities over what she said, how she looked, ceased to trouble me. I read her by this strange light: that she was a woman who could only love intelligently—love, that is, in the sense of giving herself. She had the power of passion, and it could be stirred; but he who kindled it wrecked his chance if he could not stand clear in her intellect's unsparing gaze. Twice already she must have felt herself disillusioned by me. This third time, possibly, she blamed her own fatally credulous tenderness, not me; but it was her third awakening, and could affection and warmth of heart combat it? Her child's enthusiasm for my country had prepared her for the impression which the waxen mind of the dreamy invalid received deeply; and so, aided by the emotional blood of youth, she gave me place in her imagination, probing me still curiously, as I remembered, at a season when her sedate mind was attaining to joint deliberations with the impulsive overgenerous heart.

Then ensued for her the successive shocks of discernment. She knew the to have some of the vices, many follies, all the intemperateness of men who carve a way for themselves in the common roads, if barely they do that. And resembling common men (men, in a judgement elective as hers, common, however able), I was not assuredly to be separated by her from my associations; from the thought of my father, for example. Her look at him in the lake-palace library, and her manner in unfolding and folding his recent letter to her, and in one or two necessitated allusions, embraced a kind of grave, pitiful humour, beyond smiles or any outward expression, as if the acknowledgement that it was so quite obliterated the wonder that it should be so—that one such as he could exercise influence upon her destiny. Or she may have made her reckoning generally, not personally, upon our human destinies: it is the more likely, if, as I divine, the calm oval of her lifted eyelids contemplated him in the fulness of the recognition that this world, of which we hope unuttered things, can be shifted and swayed by an ignis-fatuus. The father of one now seen through, could hardly fail of being transfixed himself. It was horrible to think of. I would rather have added a vice to my faults than that she should have penetrated him.

Nearing the island, I was reminded of the early morning when I landed on the Flemish flats. I did not expect a similar surprise, but before my rowers had pulled in, the tall beaconhead of old Schwartz notified that his mistress might be abroad. Janet walked with her. I ran up the steps to salute them, and had Ottilia's hand in mine.

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'Prince Ernest has arrived?'

'My father came yesterday evening.'

'Do you leave to-day?'

'I cannot tell; he will decide.'

It seemed a good omen, until I scanned Janet's sombre face.

'You will not see us out for the rest of the day, Harry,' said she.

'That is your arrangement?'

'It is.'

'Your own?'

'Mine, if you like.'

There was something hard in her way of speaking, as though she blamed me, and the princess were under her protection against me. She vouchsafed no friendly significance of look and tone.

In spite of my readiness to criticize her (which in our language means condemn) for always assuming leadership with whomsoever she might be, I was impressed by the air of high-bred friendliness existing between her and the princess. Their interchange was pleasant to hear. Ottilia had caught the spirit of her frank manner of speech; and she, though in a less degree, the princess's fine ease and sweetness. They conversed, apparently, like equal minds. On material points, Janet unhesitatingly led. It was she who brought the walk to a close.

'Now, Harry, you had better go and have a little sleep. I should like to speak to you early.'

Ottilia immediately put her hand out to me.

I begged permission to see her to her door.

Janet replied for her, indicating old Schwartz: 'We have a protector, you see, six feet and a half.'

An hour later, Schwartz was following her to the steps of her hotel. She saw me, and waited. For a wonder, she displayed reluctance in disburdening herself of what she had to say. 'Harry, you know that he has come? He and Prince Ernest came together. Get



him to leave the island at once: he can return to-morrow. Grandada writes of wishing to see him. Get him away to-day.'

'Is the prince going to stay here?' I asked.

'No. I daresay I am only guessing; I hope so. He has threatened the prince.'

'What with?'

'Oh! Harry, can't you understand? I'm no reader of etiquette, but even I can see that the story of a young princess travelling over to England alone to visit . . . and you . . ., and her father fetching her away! The prince is almost at his mercy, unless you make the man behave like a gentleman. This is exactly the thing Miss Goodwin feared!'

'But who's to hear of the story?' said I.

Janet gave an impatient sigh.

'Do you mean that my father has threatened to publish it, Janet?'

'I won't say he has. He has made the prince afraid to move: that I think is true.'

'Did the princess herself mention it to you?'

'She understands her situation, I am sure.'

'Did she speak of "the man," as you call him?'

'Yes: not as I do. You must try by-and-by to forgive me. Whether he set a trap or not, he has decoyed her—don't frown at words—and it remains for you to act as I don't doubt you will; but lose no time. Determine. Oh! if I were a man!'



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'You would muzzle us?'

'Muzzle, or anything you please; I would make any one related to me behave honourably. I would give him the alternative . . .'

'You foolish girl! suppose he took it?'

'I would make him feel my will. He should not take it. Keep to the circumstances, Harry. If you have no control over him—I should think I was not fit to live, in such a position! No control over him at a moment like this? and the princess in danger of having her reputation hurt! Surely, Harry! But why should I speak to you as if you were undecided!'

'Where is he?'

'At the house where you sleep. He surrendered his rooms here very kindly.'

'Auntie has seen him?'

Janet blushed: I thought I knew why. It was for subtler reasons than I should have credited her with conceiving.

'She sent for him, at my request, late last night. She believed her influence would be decisive. So do I. She could not even make the man perceive that he was acting—to use her poor dear old-fashioned word— reprehensibly in frightening the prince to further your interests. From what I gathered he went off in a song about them. She said he talked so well! And auntie Dorothy, too! I should nearly as soon have expected grandada to come in for his turn of the delusion. How I wish he was here! Uberly goes by the first boat to bring him down. I feel with Miss Goodwin that it will be a disgrace for all of us—the country's disgrace. As for our family! . . . Harry, and your name! Good-bye. Do your best.'

I was in the mood to ask, 'On behalf of the country?' She had, however, a glow and a ringing articulation in her excitement that forbade trifling; a minute's reflection set me weighing my power of will against my father's. I nodded to her.

'Come to us when you are at liberty,' she called.

I have said that I weighed my power of will against my father's. Contemplation of the state of the scales did not send me striding to meet him. Let it be remembered—I had it strongly in memory that he habitually deluded himself under the supposition that the turn of all events having an aspect of good fortune had been planned by him of old, and were offered to him as the legitimately-won fruits of a politic life. While others deemed him mad, or merely reckless, wild, a creature living for the day, he enjoyed the conceit of being a profound schemer, in which he was fortified by a really extraordinary

adroitness to take advantage of occurrences: and because he was prompt in an emergency, and quick to profit of a crisis, he was deluded to imagine that he had created it. Such a man would be with difficulty brought to surrender his prize.

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Again, there was his love for me. 'Pater est, Pamphile;—difficile est.' How was this vast conceit of a not unreal paternal love to be encountered? The sense of honour and of decency might appeal to him personally; would either of them get a hearing if he fancied them to be standing in opposition to my dearest interests? I, unhappily, as the case would be sure to present itself to him, appeared the living example of his eminently politic career. After establishing me the heir of one of the wealthiest of English commoners, would he be likely to forego any desperate chance of ennobling me by the brilliant marriage? His dreadful devotion to me extinguished the hope that he would, unless I should happen to be particularly masterful in dealing with him. I heard his nimble and overwhelming volubility like a flood advancing. That could be withstood, and his arguments and persuasions. But by what steps could I restrain the man himself? I said 'the man,' as Janet did. He figured in my apprehensive imagination as an engine more than as an individual. Lassitude oppressed me. I felt that I required every access of strength possible, physical besides moral, in anticipation of our encounter, and took a swim in sea-water, which displaced my drowsy fit, and some alarming intimations of cowardice menacing a paralysis of the will: I had not altogether recovered from my gipsy drubbing. And now I wanted to have the contest over instantly. It seemed presumable that my father had slept at my lodgings. There, however, the report of him was, that he had inspected the rooms, highly complimented the owner of them, and vanished.

Returning to the pier, I learnt that he had set sail in his hired yacht for the sister town on the Solent, at an early hour:—for what purpose? I knew of it too late to intercept it. One of the squire's horses trotted me over; I came upon Colonel Hibbert Segrave near the Club-house, and heard that my father was off again:

'But your German prince and papa-in-law shall be free of the Club for the next fortnight,' said he, and cordially asked to have the date of the marriage. My face astonished him. He excused himself for speaking of this happy event so abruptly. A sting of downright anger drove me back at a rapid canter. It flashed on me that this Prince Ernest, whose suave fashion of depressing me, and philosophical skill in managing his daughter, had induced me to regard him as a pattern of astuteness, was really both credulous and feeble, or else supremely unsuspecting: and I was confirmed in the latter idea on hearing that he had sailed to visit the opposite harbour and docks on board my father's yacht. Janet shared my secret opinion.

'The prince is a gentleman,' she said.

Her wrath and disgust were unspeakable. My aunt Dorothy blamed her for overdue severity. 'The prince, I suppose, goes of his own free will where he pleases.'

Janet burst out, 'Oh! can't you see through it, aunty? The prince goes about without at all knowing that the person who takes him—Harry sees it—is making him compromise

himself: and by-and-by the prince will discover that he has no will of his own, whatever he may wish to resolve upon doing.'

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'Is he quite against Harry?' asked my aunt Dorothy.

'Dear aunty, he 's a prince, and a proud man. He will never in his lifetime consent to . . . to what you mean, without being hounded into it. I haven't the slightest idea whether anything will force him. I know that the princess would have too much pride to submit, even to save her name. But it 's her name that 's in danger. Think of the scandal to a sovereign princess! I know the signification of that now; I used to laugh at Harry's "sovereign princess." She is one, and thorough! there is no one like her. Don't you understand, aunty, that the intrigue, plot—I don't choose to be nice upon terms—may be perfectly successful, and do good to nobody. The prince may be tricked; the princess, I am sure, will not.'

Janet's affectation of an intimate and peculiar knowledge of the princess was a show of her character that I was accustomed to: still, it was evident they had conversed much, and perhaps intimately. I led her to tell me that the princess had expressed no views upon my father. 'He does not come within her scope, Harry.' 'Scope' was one of Janet's new words, wherewith she would now and then fall to seasoning a serviceable but savourless outworn vocabulary of the common table. In spite of that and other offences, rendered prominent to me by the lifting of her lip and her frown when she had to speak of my father, I was on her side, not on his. Her estimation of the princess was soundly based. She discerned exactly the nature of Ottilia's entanglement, and her peril.

She and my aunt Dorothy passed the afternoon with Ottilia, while I crossed the head of the street, looking down at the one house, where the princess was virtually imprisoned, either by her father's express injunction or her own discretion. And it was as well that she should not be out. The yachting season had brought many London men to the island. I met several who had not forgotten the newspaper-paragraph assertions and contradictions. Lord Alton, Admiral Loftus, and others were on the pier and in the outfitters' shops, eager for gossip, as the languid stretch of indolence inclines men to be. The Admiral asked me for the whereabouts of Prince Ernest's territory. He too said that the prince would be free of the Club during his residence, adding:

'Where is he?'—not a question demanding an answer. The men might have let the princess go by, but there would have been questions urgently demanding answers had she been seen by their women.

Late in the evening my father's yacht was sighted from the pier. Just as he reached his moorings, and his boat was hauled round, the last steamer came in. Sharp-eyed Janet saw the squire on board among a crowd, and Temple next to him, supporting his arm.

'Has grandada been ill?' she exclaimed.



My chief concern was to see my father's head rising in the midst of the crowd, uncovering repeatedly. Prince Ernest and General Goodwin were behind him, stepping off the lower pier-platform. The General did not look pleased. My grandfather, with Janet holding his arm, in the place of Temple, stood waiting to see that his man had done his duty by the luggage.

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My father, advancing, perceived me, and almost taking the squire into his affectionate salutation, said:

'Nothing could be more opportune than your arrival, Mr. Beltham.'

The squire rejoined: 'I wanted to see you, Mr. Richmond; and not in public.'

'I grant the private interview, sir, at your convenience.'

Janet went up to General Goodwin. My father talked to me, and lost a moment in shaking Temple's hand and saying kind things.

'Name any hour you please, Mr. Beltham,' he resumed; 'meantime, I shall be glad to effect the introduction between Harry's grandfather and his Highness Prince Ernest of Eppenwelzen-Sarkeld.'

He turned. General Goodwin was hurrying the prince up the steps, the squire at the same time retreating hastily. I witnessed the spectacle of both parties to the projected introduction swinging round to make their escape. My father glanced to right and left. He covered in the airiest fashion what would have been confusion to another by carrying on a jocosely remark that he had left half spoken to Temple, and involved Janet in it, and soon—through sheer amiable volubility and his taking manner—the squire himself for a minute or so.

'Harry, I have to tell you she is not unhappy,' Janet whispered rapidly. 'She is reading of one of our great men alive now. She is glad to be on our ground.' Janet named a famous admiral, kindling as a fiery beacon to our blood. She would have said more: she looked the remainder; but she could have said nothing better fitted to spur me to the work she wanted done. Mournfulness dropped on me like a cloud in thinking of the bright little princess of my boyhood, and the Otilia of to-day, faithful to her early passion for our sea-heroes and my country, though it had grievously entrapped her. And into what hands! Not into hands which could cast one ray of honour on a devoted head. The contrast between the sane service—giving men she admired, and the hopping skipping social meteor, weaver of webs, thrower of nets, who offered her his history for a nuptial acquisition, was ghastly, most discomforting. He seemed to have entangled us all.

He said that he had. He treated me now confessedly as a cipher. The prince, the princess, my grandfather, and me—he had gathered us together, he said. I heard from him that the prince, assisted by him in the part of an adviser, saw no way of cutting the knot but by a marriage. All were at hand for a settlement of the terms:—Providence and destiny were dragged in.

'Let's have no theatrical talk,' I interposed.

'Certainly, Richie; the plainest English,' he assented.

This was on the pier, while he bowed and greeted passing figures. I dared not unlink my arm, for fear of further mischief. I got him to my rooms, and insisted on his dining there.

'Dry bread will do,' he said.

My anticipations of the nature of our wrestle were correct. But I had not expected him to venture on the assertion that the prince was for the marriage. He met me at every turn with this downright iteration. 'The prince consents: he knows his only chance is to yield. I have him fast.'

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'How?' I inquired.

'How, Richie? Where is your perspicuity? I have him here. I loosen a thousand tongues on him. I—'

'No, not on him; on the princess, you mean.'

'On him. The princess is the willing party; she and you are one. On him, I say. 'Tis but a threat: I hold it in terrorem. And by heaven, son Richie, it assures me I have not lived and fought for nothing. "Now is the day and now is the hour." On your first birthday, my boy, I swore to marry you to one of the highest ladies upon earth: she was, as it turns out, then unborn. No matter: I keep my oath. Abandon it? pooh! you are—forgive me—silly. Pardon me for remarking it, you have not that dashing courage—never mind. The point is, I have my prince in his trap. We are perfectly polite, but I have him, and he acknowledges it; he shrugs: love has beaten him. Very well. And observe: I permit no squire-of-low-degree insinuations; none of that. The lady—all earthly blessings on her!—does not stoop to Harry Richmond. I have the announcement in the newspapers. I maintain it the fruit of a life of long and earnest endeavour, legitimately won, by heaven it is! and with the constituted authorities of my native land against me. Your grandad proposes formally for the princess to-morrow morning.'

He maddened me. Merely to keep him silent I burst out in a flux of reproaches as torrent-like as his own could be; and all the time I was wondering whether it was true that a man who talked as he did, in his strain of florid flimsy, had actually done a practical thing.

The effect of my vehemence was to brace him and make him sedately emphatic. He declared himself to have gained entire possession of the prince's mind. He repeated his positive intention to employ his power for my benefit. Never did power of earth or of hell seem darker to me than he at that moment, when solemnly declaiming that he was prepared to forfeit my respect and love, die sooner than 'yield his prince.' He wore a new aspect, spoke briefly and pointedly, using the phrases of a determined man, and in voice and gesture signified that he had us all in a grasp of iron. The charge of his having plotted to bring it about he accepted with exultation.

'I admit,' he said, 'I did not arrange to have Germany present for a witness besides England, but since he is here, I take advantage of the fact, and to-morrow you will see young Eckart down.'

I cried out, as much enraged at my feebleness to resist him, as in disgust of his unscrupulous tricks.

'Ay, you have not known me, Richie,' said he. 'I pilot you into harbour, and all you can do is just the creaking of the vessel to me. You are in my hands. I pilot you. I have you

the husband of the princess within the month. No other course is open to her. And I have the assurance that she loses nothing by it. She is yours, my son.'

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'She will not be. You have wrecked my last chance. You cover me with dishonour.'

'You are a youngster, Richie. 'Tis the wish of her heart. Probably while you and I are talking it over, the prince is confessing that he has no escape. He has not a loophole! She came to you; you take her. I am far from withholding my admiration of her behaviour; but there it is—she came. Not consent? She is a ruined woman if she refuses!'

'Through you, through you!—through my father!'

'Have you both gone mad?'

'Try to see this,' I implored him. 'She will not be subjected by any threats. The very whisper of one will make her turn from me . . .'

He interrupted. 'Totally the contrary. The prince acknowledges that you are master of her affections.'

'Consistently with her sense of honour and respect for us.'

'Tell me of her reputation, Richie.'

'You pretend that you can damage it!'

'Pretend? I pretend in the teeth of all concerned to establish her happiness and yours, and nothing human shall stop me. I have you grateful to me before your old dad lays his head on his last pillow. And that reminds me: I surrender my town house and furniture to you. Waddy has received the word. By the way, should you hear of a good doctor for heart-disease, tell me: I have my fears for the poor soul.'

He stood up, saying, 'Richie, I am not like Jorian, to whom a lodging-house dinner is no dinner, and an irreparable loss, but I must have air. I go forth on a stroll.'

It was impossible for me to allow it. I stopped him.

We were in the midst of a debate as to his right of personal freedom, upon the singularity of which he commented with sundry ejaculations, when Temple arrived and General Goodwin sent up his card. Temple and I left the general closeted with my father, and stood at the street-door. He had seen the princess, having at her request been taken to present his respects to her by Janet. How she looked, what she said, he was dull in describing; he thought her lively, though she was pale. She had mentioned my name, 'kindly,' he observed. And he knew, or suspected, the General to be an emissary from the prince. But he could not understand the exact nature of the complication, and plagued me with a mixture of blunt inquiries and the delicate reserve proper to him so much that I had to look elsewhere for counsel and sympathy. Janet



had told him everything; still he was plunged in wonder, tempting me to think the lawyer's mind of necessity bourgeois, for the value of a sentiment seemed to have no weight in his estimation of the case. Nor did he appear disinclined to excuse my father. Some of his remarks partly swayed me, in spite of my seeing that they were based on the supposition of an 'all for love' adventure of a mad princess. They whispered a little hope, when I was adoring her passionately for being the reverse of whatever might have given hope a breath.

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General Goodwin, followed by my father, came down and led me aside after I had warned Temple not to let my father elude him. The General was greatly ruffled. 'Clara tells me she can rely on you,' he said. 'I am at the end of my arguments with that man, short of sending him to the lock-up. You will pardon me, Mr. Harry; I foresaw the scrapes in store for you, and advised you.'

'You did, General,' I confessed. 'Will you tell me what it is Prince Ernest is in dread of?'

'A pitiable scandal, sir; and if he took my recommendation, he would find instant means of punishing the man who dares to threaten him. You know it.'

I explained that I was aware of the threat, not of the degree of the prince's susceptibility; and asked him if he had seen the princess.

'I have had the honour,' he replied, stiffly. 'You gain nothing with her by this infamous proceeding.'

I swallowed my anger, and said, 'Do you accuse me, General?'

'I do not accuse you,' he returned, unbendingly. 'You chose your path some ten or twelve years ago, and you must take the consequences. I foresaw it; but this I will say, I did not credit the man with his infernal cleverness. If I speak to you at all, I must speak my mind. I thought him a mere buffoon and spendthrift, flying his bar-sinister story for the sake of distinction. He has schemed up to this point successfully: he has the prince in his toils. I would cut through them, as I have informed Prince Ernest. I daresay different positions lead to different reasonings; the fellow appears to have a fascination over him. Your father, Mr. Harry, is guilty now—he is guilty, I reiterate, now of a piece of iniquity that makes me ashamed to own him for a countryman.'

The General shook himself erect. 'Are you unable to keep him in?' he asked.

My nerves were pricking and stinging with the insults I had to listen to, and conscience's justification of them.

He repeated the question.

'I will do what I can,' I said, unsatisfactorily to myself and to him, for he transposed our situations, telling me the things he would say and do in my place; things not dissimilar to those I had already said and done, only more toweringly enunciated; and for that reason they struck me as all the more hopelessly ineffectual, and made me despair.

My dumbness excited his ire. 'Come,' said he; 'the lady is a spoilt child. She behaved foolishly; but from your point of view you should feel bound to protect her on that very account. Do your duty, young gentleman. He is, I believe, fond of you, and if so, you have him by a chain. I tell you frankly, I hold you responsible.'

His way of speaking of the princess opened an idea of the world's, in the event of her name falling into its clutches.

I said again, 'I will do what I can,' and sang out for Temple.

He was alone. My father had slipped from him to leave a card at the squire's hotel. General Goodwin touched Temple on the shoulder kindly, in marked contrast to his treatment of me, and wished us good-night. Nothing had been heard of my father by Janet, but while I was sitting with her, at a late hour, his card was brought up, and a pencilled entreaty for an interview the next morning.

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'That will suit grandada,' Janet said. 'He commissioned me before going to bed to write the same for him.'

She related that the prince was in a state of undisguised distraction. From what I could comprehend—it appeared incredible—he regarded his daughter's marriage as the solution of the difficulty, the sole way out of the meshes.

'Is not that her wish?' said Temple; perhaps with a wish of his own.

'Oh, if you think a lady like the Princess Ottilia is led by her wishes,' said Janet. Her radiant perception of an ideal in her sex (the first she ever had) made her utterly contemptuous toward the less enlightened.

We appointed the next morning at half-past eleven for my father's visit.

'Not a minute later,' Janet said in my ear, urgently. 'Don't—don't let him move out of your sight, Harry! The princess is convinced you are not to blame.'

I asked her whether she had any knowledge of the squire's designs.

'I have not, on my honour,' she answered. 'But I hope . . . It is so miserable to think of this disgraceful thing! She is too firm to give way. She does not blame you. I am sure I do not; only, Harry, one always feels that if one were in another's place, in a case like this, I could and would command him. I would have him obey me. One is not born to accept disgrace even from a father. I should say, "You shall not stir, if you mean to act dishonourably." One is justified, I am sure, in breaking a tie of relationship that involves you in dishonour. Grandada has not spoken a word to me on the subject. I catch at straws. This thing burns me! Oh, good-night, Harry. I can't sleep.'

'Good-night,' she called softly to Temple on the stairs below. I heard the poor fellow murmuring good-night to himself in the street, and thought him happier than I. He slept at a room close to the hotel.

A note from Clara Goodwin adjured me, by her memory of the sweet, brave, gracious fellow she loved in other days, to be worthy of what I had been. The General had unnerved her reliance on me.

I sat up for my father until long past midnight. When he came his appearance reminded me of the time of his altercation with Baroness Turckems under the light of the blazing curtains: he had supped and drunk deeply, and he very soon proclaimed that I should find him invincible, which, as far as insensibility to the strongest appeals to him went, he was.

'Deny you love her, deny she loves you, deny you are one—I knot you fast!'

He had again seen Prince Ernest; so he said, declaring that the Prince positively desired the marriage; would have it. 'And I,' he dramatized their relative situations, 'consented.'

After my experience of that night, I forgive men who are unmoved by displays of humour. Commonly we think it should be irresistible. His description of the thin-skinned sensitive prince striving to run and dodge for shelter from him, like a fever-patient pursued by a North-easter, accompanied by dozens of quaint similes full of his mental laughter, made my loathing all the more acute. But I had not been an equal match for him previous to his taking wine; it was waste of breath and heart to contend with him. I folded my arms tight, sitting rigidly silent, and he dropped on the sofa luxuriously.

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'Bed, Richie!' he waved to me. 'You drink no wine, you cannot stand dissipation as I do. Bed, my dear boy! I am a God, sir, inaccessible to mortal ailments! Seriously, dear boy, I have never known an illness in my life. I have killed my hundreds of poor devils who were for imitating me. This I boast—I boast constitution. And I fear, Richie, you have none of my superhuman strength. Added to that, I know I am watched over. I ask—I have: I scheme the tricks are in my hand! It may be the doing of my mother in heaven; there is the fact for you to reflect on. "Stand not in my way, nor follow me too far," would serve me for a motto admirably, and you can put it in Latin, Richie. Bed! You shall turn your scholarship to account as I do my genius in your interest. On my soul, that motto in Latin will requite me. Now to bed.'

'No,' said I. 'You have got away from me once. I shall keep you in sight and hearing, if I have to lie at your door for it. You will go with me to London to-morrow. I shall treat you as a man I have to guard, and I shall not let you loose before I am quite sure of you.'

'Loose!' he exclaimed, throwing up an arm and a leg.

'I mean, sir, that you shall be in my presence wherever you are, and I will take care you don't go far and wide. It's useless to pretend astonishment. I don't argue and I don't beseech any further: I just sit on guard, as I would over a powder-cask.'

My father raised himself on an elbow. 'The explosion,' he said, examining his watch, 'occurred at about five minutes to eleven—we are advancing into the morning—last night. I received on your behalf the congratulations of friends Loftus, Alton, Segrave, and the rest, at that hour. So, my dear Richie, you are sitting on guard over the empty magazine.'

I listened with a throbbing forehead, and controlled the choking in my throat, to ask him whether he had touched the newspapers.

'Ay, dear lad, I have sprung my mine in them,' he replied.

'You have sent word—?'

'I have despatched a paragraph to the effect, that the prince and princess have arrived to ratify the nuptial preliminaries.'

'You expect it to appear this day?'

'Or else my name and influence are curiously at variance with the confidence I repose in them, Richie.'

'Then I leave you to yourself,' I said. 'Prince Ernest knows he has to expect this statement in the papers?'



'We trumped him with that identical court-card, Richie.'

'Very well. To-morrow, after we have been to my grandfather, you and I part company for good, sir. It costs me too much.'

'Dear old Richie,' he laughed, gently. 'And now to bye-bye! My blessing on you now and always.'

He shut his eyes.

CHAPTER LI

AN ENCOUNTER SHOWING MY FATHER'S GENIUS IN A STRONG LIGHT

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The morning was sultry with the first rising of the sun. I knew that Ottilia and Janet would be out. For myself, I dared not leave the house. I sat in my room, harried by the most penetrating snore which can ever have afflicted wakeful ears. It proclaimed so deep-seated a peacefulness in the bosom of the disturber, and was so arrogant, so ludicrous, and inaccessible to remonstrance, that it sounded like a renewal of our midnight altercation on the sleeper's part. Prolonged now and then beyond all bounds, it ended in the crashing blare whereof utter wakefulness cannot imagine honest sleep to be capable, but a playful melody twirled back to the regular note. He was fast asleep on the sitting-room sofa, while I walked fretting and panting. To this twinship I seemed condemned. In my heart nevertheless there was a reserve of wonderment at his apparent astuteness and resolution, and my old love for him whispered disbelief in his having disgraced me. Perhaps it was wilful self-deception. It helped me to meet him with a better face.

We both avoided the subject of our difference for some time: he would evidently have done so altogether, and used his best and sweetest manner to divert me: but when I struck on it, asking him if he had indeed told me the truth last night, his features clouded as though with an effort of patience. To my consternation, he suddenly broke away, with his arms up, puffing and stammering, stamping his feet. He would have a truce—he insisted on a truce, I understood him to exclaim, and that I was like a woman, who would and would not, and wanted a master. He raved of the gallant down-rightedness of the young bloods of his day, and how splendidly this one and that had compassed their ends by winning great ladies, lawfully, or otherwise. For several minutes he was in a state of frenzy, appealing to his pattern youths of a bygone generation, as to moral principles—stuttering, and of a dark red hue from the neck to the temples. I refrained from a scuffle of tongues. Nor did he excuse himself after he had cooled. His hand touched instinctively for his pulse, and, with a glance at the ceiling, he exclaimed, 'Good Lord!' and brought me to his side. 'These wigwam houses check my circulation,' said he. 'Let us go out—let us breakfast on board.'

The open air restored him, and he told me that he had been merely oppressed by the architect of the inferior classes, whose ceiling sat on his head. My nerves, he remarked to me, were very excitable. 'You should take your wine, Richie,—you require it. Your dear mother had a low-toned nervous system.' I was silent, and followed him, at once a captive and a keeper.

This day of slackened sails and a bright sleeping water kept the yachtsmen on land; there was a crowd to meet the morning boat. Foremost among those who stepped out of it was the yellow-haired Eckart, little suspecting what the sight of him signalled to me. I could scarcely greet him at all, for in him I perceived that my father had fully committed himself to his plot, and left me nothing to hope. Eckart said something of Prince Hermann. As we were walking off the pier, I saw Janet conversing with Prince Ernest, and the next minute Hermann himself was one of the group. I turned to Eckart for an explanation.

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'Didn't I tell you he called at your house in London and travelled down with me this morning!' said Eckart.

My father looked in the direction of the princes, but his face was for the moment no index. They bowed to Janet, and began talking hurriedly in the triangle of road between her hotel, the pier, and the way to the villas: passing on, and coming to a full halt, like men who are not reserving their minds. My father stepped out toward them. He was met by Prince Ernest. Hermann turned his back.

It being the hour of the appointment, I delivered Eckart over to Temple's safe-keeping, and went up to Janet. 'Don't be late, Harry,' she said.

I asked her if she knew the object of the meeting appointed by my grandfather.

She answered impatiently, 'Do get him away from the prince.' And then: 'I ought to tell you the princess is well, and so on—pardon me just now: Grandada is kept waiting, and I don't like it.'

Her actual dislike was to see Prince Ernest in dialogue with my father, it seemed to me; and the manner of both, which was, one would have said, intimate, anything but the manner of adversaries. Prince Ernest appeared to affect a pleasant humour; he twice, after shaking my father's hand, stepped back to him, as if to renew some impression. Their attitude declared them to be on the best of terms. Janet withdrew her attentive eyes from observing them, and threw a world of meaning into her abstracted gaze at me. My father's advance put her to flight.

Yet she gave him the welcome of a high-bred young woman when he entered the drawing-room of my grandfather's hotel-suite. She was alone, and she obliged herself to accept conversation graciously. He recommended her to try the German Baths for the squire's gout, and evidently amused her with his specific probations for English persons designing to travel in company, that they should previously live together in a house with a collection of undisciplined chambermaids, a musical footman, and a mad cook: to learn to accommodate their tempers. 'I would add a touch of earthquake, Miss Ilchester, just to make sure that all the party know one another's edges before starting.' This was too far a shot of nonsense for Janet, whose native disposition was to refer to lunacy or stupidity, or trickery, whatsoever was novel to her understanding. 'I, for my part,' said he, 'stipulate to have for comrade no man who fancies himself a born and stamped chieftain, no inveterate student of maps, and no dog with a turn for feeling himself pulled by the collar. And that reminds me you are amateur of dogs. Have you a Pomeranian boar-hound?'

'No,' said Janet; 'I have never even seen one'

'That high.' My father raised his hand flat.

'Bigger than our Newfoundlands!'

'Without exaggeration, big as a pony. You will permit me to send you one, warranted to have passed his distemper, which can rarely be done for our human species, though here and there I venture to guarantee my man as well as my dog.'

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Janet interposed her thanks, declining to take the dog, but he dwelt on the dog's charms, his youth, stature, appearance, fitness, and grandeur, earnestly. I had to relieve her apprehensions by questioning where the dog was.

'In Germany,' he said.

It was not improbable, nor less so that the dog was in Pomerania likewise.

The entry of my aunt Dorothy, followed by my grandfather, was silent.

'Be seated,' the old man addressed us in a body, to cut short particular salutations.

My father overshadowed him with drooping shoulders.

Janet wished to know whether she was to remain.

'I like you by me always,' he answered, bluff and sharp.

'We have some shopping to do,' my aunt Dorothy murmured, showing she was there against her will.

'Do you shop out of London?' said my father; and for some time he succeeded in making us sit for the delusive picture of a comfortable family meeting.

My grandfather sat quite still, Janet next to him. 'When you've finished, Mr. Richmond,' he remarked.

'Mr. Beltham, I was telling Miss Beltham that I join in the abuse of London exactly because I love it. A paradox! she says. But we seem to be effecting a kind of insurance on the life of the things we love best by crying them down violently. You have observed it? Denounce them—they endure for ever! So I join any soul on earth in decrying our dear London. The naughty old City can bear it.'

There was a clearing of throats. My aunt Dorothy's foot tapped the floor.

'But I presume you have done me the honour to invite me to this conference on a point of business, Mr. Beltham?' said my father, admonished by the hint.

'I have, sir,' the squire replied.

'And I also have a point. And, in fact, it is urgent, and with your permission, Mr. Beltham, I will lead the way.'

'No, sir, if you please.'



I'm a short speaker, and go to it at once, and I won't detain you a second after you've answered me.'

My father nodded to this, with the conciliatory comment that it was business-like.

The old man drew out his pocket-book.

'You paid a debt,' he said deliberately, 'amounting to twenty-one thousand pounds to my grandson's account.'

'Oh! a debt! I did, sir. Between father and boy, dad and lad; debts! . . . but use your own terms, I pray you.'

'I don't ask you where that money is now. I ask you to tell me where you got it from.'

'You speak bluntly, my dear sir.'

'You won't answer, then?'

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'You ask the question as a family matter? I reply with alacrity, to the best of my ability: and with my hand on my heart, Mr. Beltham, let me assure you, I very heartily desire the information to be furnished to me. Or rather—why should I conceal it? The sources are irregular, but a child could toddle its way to them—you take my indication. Say that I obtained it from my friends. My friends, Mr. Beltham, are of the kind requiring squeezing. Government, as my chum and good comrade, Jorian DeWitt, is fond of saying, is a sponge—a thing that when you dive deep enough to catch it gives liberal supplies, but will assuredly otherwise reverse the process by acting the part of an absorbent. I get what I get by force of arms, or I might have perished long since.'

'Then you don't know where you got it from, sir?'

'Technically, you are correct, sir.'

'A bird didn't bring it, and you didn't find it in the belly of a fish.'

'Neither of these prodigies. They have occurred in books I am bound to believe; they did not happen to me.'

'You swear to me you don't know the man, woman, or committee, who gave you that sum?'

'I do not know, Mr. Beltham. In an extraordinary history, extraordinary circumstances! I have experienced so many that I am surprised at nothing.'

'You suppose you got it from some fool?'

'Oh! if you choose to indict Government collectively?'

'You pretend you got it from Government?'

'I am termed a Pretender by some, Mr. Beltham. The facts are these: I promised to refund the money, and I fulfilled the promise. There you have the only answer I can make to you. Now to my own affair. I come to request you to demand the hand of the Princess of Eppenwelzen-Sarkeld on behalf of my son Harry, your grandson; and I possess the assurance of the prince, her father, that it will be granted. Doubtless you, sir, are of as old a blood as the prince himself. You will acknowledge that the honour brought to the family by an hereditary princess is considerable: it is something. I am prepared to accompany you to his Highness, or not, as you please. It is but a question of dotation, and a selection from one or two monosyllables.'

Janet shook her dress.

The squire replied: 'We 'll take that up presently. I haven't quite done. Will you tell me what agent paid you the sum of money?'



'The usual agent—a solicitor, Mr. Beltham; a gentleman whose business lay amongst the aristocracy; he is defunct; and a very worthy old gentleman he was, with a remarkable store of anecdotes of his patrons, very discreetly told: for you never heard a name from him.'

'You took him for an agent of Government, did you? why?'

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'To condense a long story, sir, the kernel of the matter is, that almost from the hour I began to stir for the purpose of claiming my rights— which are transparent enough this old gentleman—certainly from no sinister motive, I may presume—commenced the payment of an annuity; not sufficient for my necessities, possibly, but warrant of an agreeable sort for encouraging my expectations; although oddly, this excellent old Mr. Bannerbridge invariably served up the dish in a sauce that did not agree with it, by advising me of the wish of the donator that I should abandon my Case. I consequently, in common with my friends, performed a little early lesson in arithmetic, and we came to the one conclusion open to reflective minds—namely, that I was feared.'

My aunt Dorothy looked up for the first time.

'Janet and I have some purchases to make,' she said.

The squire signified sharply that she must remain where she was.

'I think aunty wants fresh air; she had a headache last night,' said Janet.

I suggested that, as my presence did not seem to be required, I could take her on my arm for a walk to the pier-head.

Her face was burning; she would gladly have gone out, but the squire refused to permit it, and she nodded over her crossed hands, saying that she was in no hurry.

'Ha! I am,' quoth he.

'Dear Miss Beltham !' my father ejaculated solicitously. 'Here, sir, oblige me by attending to me,' cried the squire, fuming and blinking. 'I sent for you on a piece of business. You got this money through a gentleman, a solicitor, named Bannerbridge, did you?'

'His name was Bannerbridge, Mr. Beltham.'

'Dorothy, you knew a Mr. Bannerbridge?'

She faltered: 'I knew him Harry was lost in the streets of London when he was a little fellow, and the Mr. Bannerbridge I knew found him and took him to his house, and was very kind to him.'

'What was his Christian name?'

I gave them: 'Charles Adolphus.'

'The identical person!' exclaimed my father.



'Oh! you admit it,' said the squire. 'Ever seen him since the time Harry was lost, Dorothy?'

'Yes,' she answered. 'I have heard he is dead:

'Did you see him shortly before his death?'

'I happened to see him a short time before.!

'He was your man of business, was he?'

'For such little business as I had to do.'

'You were sure you could trust him, eh?'

'Yes.'

My aunt Dorothy breathed deeply.

'By God, ma'am, you're a truthful woman!'

The old man gave her a glare of admiration.

It was now my turn to undergo examination, and summoned by his apostrophe to meet his eyes, I could appreciate the hardness of the head I had to deal with.

'Harry, I beg your pardon beforehand; I want to get at facts; I must ask you what you know about where the money came from?'

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I spoke of my attempts to discover the whence and wherefore of it.

'Government? eh?' he sneered.

'I really can't judge whether it came from that quarter,' said I.

'What do you think?—think it likely?'

I thought it unlikely, and yet likelier than that it should have come from an individual.

'Then you don't suspect any particular person of having sent it in the nick of time, Harry Richmond?'

I replied: 'No, sir; unless you force me to suspect you.'

He jumped in his chair, astounded and wrathful, confounded me for insinuating that he was a Bedlamite, and demanded the impudent reason of my suspecting him to have been guilty of the infernal folly.

I had but the reason to instance that he was rich and kind at heart.

'Rich! kind!' he bellowed. 'Just excuse me—I must ask for the purpose of my inquiry;—there, tell me, how much do you believe you 've got of that money remaining? None o' that Peterborough style of counting in the back of your pate. Say!'

There was a dreadful silence.

My father leaned persuasively forward.

'Mr. Beltham, I crave permission to take up the word. Allow me to remind you of the prize Harry has won. The prince awaits you to bestow on him the hand of his daughter —'

'Out with it, Harry,' shouted the squire.

'Not to mention Harry's seat in Parliament,' my father resumed, 'he has a princess to wife, indubitably one of the most enviable positions in the country! It is unnecessary to count on future honours; they may be alluded to. In truth, sir, we make him the first man in the country. Not necessarily Premier: you take my meaning: he possesses the combination of social influence and standing with political achievements, and rank and riches in addition—'

'I 'm speaking to my grandson, sir,' the squire rejoined, shaking himself like a man rained on. 'I 'm waiting for a plain answer, and no lie. You've already confessed as

much as that the money you told me on your honour you put out to interest; psh!—for my grandson was smoke. Now let's hear him.'

My father called out: 'I claim a hearing! The money you speak of was put out to the very highest interest. You have your grandson in Parliament, largely acquainted with the principal members of society, husband of an hereditary princess! You have only at this moment to propose for her hand. I guarantee it to you. With that money I have won him everything. Not that I would intimate to you that princesses are purchaseable. The point is, I knew how to employ it.'

'In two months' time, the money in the Funds in the boy's name—you told me that.'

'You had it in the Funds in Harry Richmond's name, sir.'

'Well, sir, I'm asking him whether it's in the Funds now.'

'Oh! Mr. Beltham.'

'What answer's that?'

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The squire was really confused by my father's interruption, and lost sight of me.

'I ask where it came from: I ask whether it's squandered?' he continued.

'Mr. Beltham, I reply that you have only to ask for it to have it; do so immediately.'

'What 's he saying?' cried the baffled old man.

'I give you a thousand times the equivalent of the money, Mr. Beltham.'

'Is the money there?'

'The lady is here.'

'I said money, sir.'

'A priceless honour and treasure, I say emphatically.' My grandfather's brows and mouth were gathering for storm. Janet touched his knee.

'Where the devil your understanding truckles, if you have any, I don't know,' he muttered. 'What the deuce—lady got to do with money!'

'Oh!' my father laughed lightly, 'customarily the alliance is, they say, as close as matrimony. Pardon me. To speak with becoming seriousness, Mr. Beltham, it was duly imperative that our son should be known in society, should be, you will apprehend me, advanced in station, which I had to do through the ordinary political channel. There could not but be a considerable expenditure for such a purpose.'

'In Balls, and dinners!'

'In everything that builds a young gentleman's repute.'

'You swear to me you gave your Balls and dinners, and the lot, for Harry Richmond's sake?'

'On my veracity, I did, sir!'

'Please don't talk like a mountebank. I don't want any of your roundabout words for truth; we're not writing a Bible essay. I try my best to be civil.'

My father beamed on him.

'I guarantee you succeed, sir. Nothing on earth can a man be so absolutely sure of as to succeed in civility, if he honestly tries at it. Jorian DeWitt,—by the way, you may not know him—an esteemed old friend of mine, says—that is, he said once—to a tolerably impudent fellow whom he had disconcerted with a capital retort, "You may try to be a

gentleman, and blunder at it, but if you will only try to be his humble servant, we are certain to establish a common footing.” Jorian, let me tell you, is a wit worthy of our glorious old days.’

My grandfather eased his heart with a plunging breath.

‘Well, sir, I didn’t ask you here for your opinion or your friend’s, and I don’t care for modern wit.’

‘Nor I, Mr. Beltham, nor I! It has the reek of stable straw. We are of one mind on that subject. The thing slouches, it sprawls. It—to quote Jorian once more—is like a dirty, idle, little stupid boy who cannot learn his lesson and plays the fool with the alphabet. You smile, Miss Ilchester: you would appreciate Jorian. Modern wit is emphatically degenerate. It has no scintillation, neither thrust nor parry. I compare it to boxing, as opposed to the more beautiful science of fencing.’

‘Well, sir, I don’t want to hear your comparisons,’ growled the squire, much oppressed.
‘Stop a minute . . .’

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'Half a minute to me, sir,' said my father, with a glowing reminiscence of Jorian DeWitt, which was almost too much for the combustible old man, even under Janet's admonition.

My aunt Dorothy moved her head slightly toward my father, looking on the floor, and he at once drew in.

'Mr. Beltham, I attend to you submissively.'

'You do? Then tell me what brought this princess to England?'

'The conviction that Harry had accomplished his oath to mount to an eminence in his country, and had made the step she is about to take less, I will say, precipitous: though I personally decline to admit a pointed inferiority.'

'You wrote her a letter.'

'That, containing the news of the attack on him and his desperate illness, was the finishing touch to the noble lady's passion.'

'Attack? I know nothing about an attack. You wrote her a letter and wrote her a lie. You said he was dying.'

'I had the boy inanimate on my breast when I despatched the epistle.'

'You said he had only a few days to live.'

'So in my affliction I feared.'

'Will you swear you didn't write that letter with the intention of drawing her over here to have her in your power, so that you might threaten you'd blow on her reputation if she or her father held out against you and all didn't go as you fished for it?'

My father raised his head proudly.

'I divide your query into two parts. I wrote, sir, to bring her to his side. I did not write with any intention to threaten.'

'You've done it, though.'

'I have done this,' said my father, toweringly: 'I have used the power placed in my hands by Providence to overcome the hesitations of a gentleman whose illustrious rank predisposes him to sacrifice his daughter's happiness to his pride of birth and station. Can any one confute me when I assert that the princess loves Harry Richmond?'



I walked abruptly to one of the windows, hearing a pitiable wrangling on the theme. My grandfather vowed she had grown wiser, my father protested that she was willing and anxious; Janet was appealed to. In a strangely-sounding underbreath, she said, 'The princess does not wish it.'

'You hear that, Mr. Richmond?' cried the squire.

He returned: 'Can Miss Ilchester say that the Princess Ottilia does not passionately love my son Harry Richmond? The circumstances warrant me in beseeching a direct answer.'

She uttered: 'No.'

I looked at her; she at me.

'You can conduct a case, Richmond,' the squire remarked.

My father rose to his feet. 'I can conduct my son to happiness and greatness, my dear sir; but to some extent I require your grandfatherly assistance; and I urge you now to present your respects to the prince and princess, and judge yourself of his Highness's disposition for the match. I assure you in advance that he welcomes the proposal.'

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'I do not believe it,' said Janet, rising.

My aunt Dorothy followed her example, saying: 'In justice to Harry the proposal should be made. At least it will settle this dispute.'

Janet stared at her, and the squire threw his head back with an amazed interjection.

'What! You're for it now? Why, at breakfast you were all t' other way! You didn't want this meeting because you pooh-poohed the match.'

'I do think you should go,' she answered. 'You have given Harry your promise, and if he empowers you, it is right to make the proposal, and immediately, I think.'

She spoke feverishly, with an unsweet expression of face, that seemed to me to indicate vexedness at the squire's treatment of my father.

'Harry,' she asked me in a very earnest fashion, 'is it your desire? Tell your grandfather that it is, and that you want to know your fate. Why should there be any dispute on a fact that can be ascertained by crossing a street? Surely it is trifling.'

Janet stooped to whisper in the squire's ear.

He caught the shock of unexpected intelligence apparently; faced about, gazed up, and cried: 'You too! But I haven't done here. I've got to cross-examine . . . Pretend, do you mean? Pretend I'm ready to go? I can release this prince just as well here as there.'

Janet laughed faintly.

'I should advise your going, grandada.'

'You a weathercock woman!' he reproached her, quite mystified, and fell to rubbing his head. 'Suppose I go to be snubbed?'

'The prince is a gentleman, grandada. Come with me. We will go alone. You can relieve the prince, and protect him.'

My father nodded: 'I approve.'

'And grandada—but it will not so much matter if we are alone, though,' Janet said.

'Speak out.'

'See the princess as well; she must be present.'

'I leave it to you,' he said, crestfallen.



Janet pressed my aunt Dorothy's hand.

'Aunty, you were right, you are always right. This state of suspense is bad all round, and it is infinitely worse for the prince and princess.'

My aunt Dorothy accepted the eulogy with a singular trembling wrinkle of the forehead.

She evidently understood that Janet had seen her wish to get released.

For my part, I shared my grandfather's stupefaction at their unaccountable changes. It appeared almost as if my father had won them over to baffle him. The old man tried to insist on their sitting down again, but Janet perseveringly smiled and smiled until he stood up. She spoke to him softly. He was one black frown; displeased with her; obedient, however.

Too soon after, I had the key to the enigmatical scene. At the moment I was contemptuous of riddles, and heard with idle ears Janet's promptings to him and his replies. 'It would be so much better to settle it here,' he said. She urged that it could not be settled here without the whole burden and responsibility falling upon him.

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'Exactly,' interposed my father, triumphing.

Dorothy Beltham came to my side, and said, as if speaking to herself, while she gazed out of window, 'If a refusal, it should come from the prince.' She dropped her voice: 'The money has not been spent? Has it? Has any part of it been spent? Are you sure you have more than three parts of it?'

Now, that she should be possessed by the spirit of parsimony on my behalf at such a time as this, was to my conception insanely comical, and her manner of expressing it was too much for me. I kept my laughter under to hear her continue: 'What numbers are flocking on the pier! and there is no music yet. Tell me, Harry, that the money is all safe; nearly all; it is important to know; you promised economy.'

'Music did you speak of, Miss Beltham?' My father bowed to her gallantly. 'I chanced to overhear you. My private band performs to the public at midday.'

She was obliged to smile to excuse his interruption.

'What's that? whose band?' said the squire, bursting out of Janet's hand. 'A private band?'

Janet had a difficulty in resuming her command of him. The mention of the private band made him very restive.

'I 'm not acting on my own judgement at all in going to these foreign people,' he said to Janet. 'Why go? I can have it out here and an end to it, without bothering them and their interpreters.'

He sang out to me: 'Harry, do you want me to go through this form for you?—mn'd unpleasant!'

My aunt Dorothy whispered in my ear: 'Yes! yes!'

'I feel tricked!' he muttered, and did not wait for me to reply before he was again questioning my aunt Dorothy concerning Mr. Bannerbridge, and my father as to 'that sum of money.' But his method of interrogation was confused and pointless. The drift of it was totally obscure.

'I'm off my head to-day,' he said to Janet, with a sideshot of his eye at my father.

'You waste time and trouble, grandada,' said she.

He vowed that he was being bewildered, bothered by us all; and I thought I had never seen him so far below his level of energy; but I had not seen him condescend to put himself upon a moderately fair footing with my father. The truth was, that Janet had

rigorously schooled him to bridle his temper, and he was no match for the voluble easy man without the freest play of his tongue.

'This prince!' he kept ejaculating.

'Won't you understand, grandada, that you relieve him, and make things clear by going?' Janet said.

He begged her fretfully not to be impatient, and hinted that she and he might be acting the part of dupes, and was for pursuing his inauspicious cross-examination in spite of his blundering, and the 'Where am I now?' which pulled him up. My father, either talking to my aunt Dorothy, to Janet, or to me, on ephemeral topics, scarcely noticed him, except when he was questioned, and looked secure of success in the highest degree consistent with perfect calmness.

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'So you say you tell me to go, do you?' the squire called to me. 'Be good enough to stay here and wait. I don't see that anything's gained by my going: it's damned hard on me, having to go to a man whose language I don't know, and he don't know mine, on a business we're all of us in a muddle about. I'll do it if it's right. You're sure?'

He glanced at Janet. She nodded.

I was looking for this quaint and, to me, incomprehensible interlude to commence with the departure of the squire and Janet, when a card was handed in by one of the hotel-waiters.

'Another prince!' cried the squire. 'These Germans seem to grow princes like potatoes—dozens to a root! Who's the card for? Ask him to walk up. Show him into a quiet room. Does he speak English?'

'Does Prince Hermann of—I can't pronounce the name of the place—speak English, Harry?' Janet asked me.

'As well as you or I,' said I, losing my inattention all at once with a mad leap of the heart.

Hermann's presence gave light, fire, and colour to the scene in which my destiny had been wavering from hand to hand without much more than amusedly interesting me, for I was sure that I had lost Ottilia; I knew that too well, and worse could not happen. I had besides lost other things that used to sustain me, and being reckless, I was contemptuous, and listened to the talk about money with sublime indifference to the subject: with an attitude, too, I daresay. But Hermann's name revived my torment. Why had he come? to persuade the squire to control my father? Nothing but that would suffer itself to be suggested, though conjectures lying in shadow underneath pressed ominously on my mind.

My father had no doubts.

'A word to you, Mr. Beltham, before you go to Prince Hermann. He is an emissary, we treat him with courtesy, and if he comes to diplomatize we, of course, give a patient hearing. I have only to observe in the most emphatic manner possible that I do not retract one step. I will have this marriage: I have spoken! It rests with Prince Ernest.'

The squire threw a hasty glare of his eyes back as he was hobbling on Janet's arm. She stopped short, and replied for him.

'Mr. Beltham will speak for himself, in his own name. We are not concerned in any unworthy treatment of Prince Ernest. We protest against it.'

'Dear young lady!' said my father, graciously. 'I meet you frankly. Now tell me. I know you a gallant horsewoman: if you had lassoed the noble horse of the desert would you



let him run loose because of his remonstrating? Side with me, I entreat you! My son is my first thought. The pride of princes and wild horses you will find wonderfully similar, especially in the way they take their taming when once they feel they are positively caught. We show him we have him fast—he falls into our paces on the spot! For Harry's sake—for the princess's, I beg you

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exert your universally—deservedly acknowledged influence. Even now—and you frown on me!—I cannot find it in my heart to wish you the sweet and admirable woman of the world you are destined to be, though you would comprehend me and applaud me, for I could not—no, not to win your favourable opinion! —consent that you should be robbed of a single ray of your fresh maidenly youth. If you must misjudge me, I submit. It is the price I pay for seeing you young and lovely. Prince Ernest is, credit me, not unworthily treated by me, if life is a battle, and the prize of it to the General's head. I implore you—he lured her with the dimple of a lurking smile—'do not seriously blame your afflicted senior, if we are to differ. I am vastly your elder: you instil the doubt whether I am by as much the wiser of the two; but the father of Harry Richmond claims to know best what will ensure his boy's felicity. Is he rash? Pronounce me guilty of an excessive anxiety for my son's welfare; say that I am too old to read the world with the accuracy of a youthful intelligence: call me indiscreet: stigmatize me unlucky; the severest sentence a judge'—he bowed to her deferentially—'can utter; only do not cast a gaze of rebuke on me because my labour is for my son—my utmost devotion. And we know, Miss Ilchester, that the princess honours him with her love. I protest in all candour, I treat love as love; not as a weight in the scale; it is the heavenly power which dispenses with weighing! its ascendancy . . .'

The squire could endure no more, and happily so, for my father was losing his remarkably moderated tone, and threatening polysyllables. He had followed Janet, step for step, at a measured distance, drooping toward her with his winningest air, while the old man pulled at her arm to get her out of hearing of the obnoxious flatterer. She kept her long head in profile, trying creditably not to appear discourteous to one who addressed her by showing an open ear, until the final bolt made by the frenzied old man dragged her through the doorway. His neck was shortened behind his collar as though he shrugged from the blast of a bad wind. I believe that, on the whole, Janet was pleased. I will wager that, left to herself, she would have been drawn into an answer, if not an argument. Nothing would have made her resolution swerve, I admit.

They had not been out of the room three seconds when my aunt Dorothy was called to join them. She had found time to say that she hoped the money was intact.

ETEXT EDITOR'S BOOKMARKS:

All passed too swift for happiness
He clearly could not learn from misfortune
Intimations of cowardice menacing a paralysis of the will
Like a woman, who would and would not, and wanted a master
One in a temper at a time I'm sure 's enough

Simple affection must bear the strain of friendship if it can
Stand not in my way, nor follow me too far

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Tension of the old links keeping us together
The thought stood in her eyes
They have not to speak to exhibit their minds
Tight grasps of the hand, in which there was warmth and shyness
To the rest of the world he was a progressive comedy
Was I true? Not so very false, yet how far from truth!
Who so intoxicated as the convalescent catching at health?